

consumer
electronics



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Lifestyles™

CE Gifts For Moms, Dads & Grads



Best Budget Digital Cameras

Our Favorite Cell Phone Providers

Get The Scoop On Blu-ray & HD DVD

May 2006
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WACOM**graphire⁴**

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Have fun with your digital photos

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Quickly and easily edit your digital photos using the control of the Graphire pen and your included copy of Adobe® Photoshop® Elements 3. Selectively apply high-quality photographic enhancements using the included nik Color Efex Pro™ 2 GE filter collection.



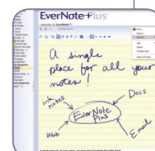
Draw and paint

Create original artwork with the natural feel of your Graphire pen and the amazing capabilities of the included copy of Corel® Painter™ Essentials 2.



Jot notes, mark-up, and sign

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- 512 levels of pressure sensitivity for natural brush control
- Patented cordless, battery-free technology for a natural feel and superior performance



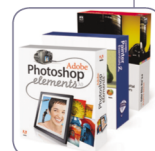
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Includes Adobe Photoshop Elements 3, Corel Painter Essentials 2 for creating natural media art, and nik Color Efex Pro 2 GE for selectively applying photo enhancements. Jot notes in EverNote Plus (PC) and annotate documents in JustWrite Office (PC).



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For the serious photographer, designer, and artist

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Cintiq®

Work directly on screen

Cintiq 21UX – \$2499



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Table Of Contents • Volume 3 Issue 5

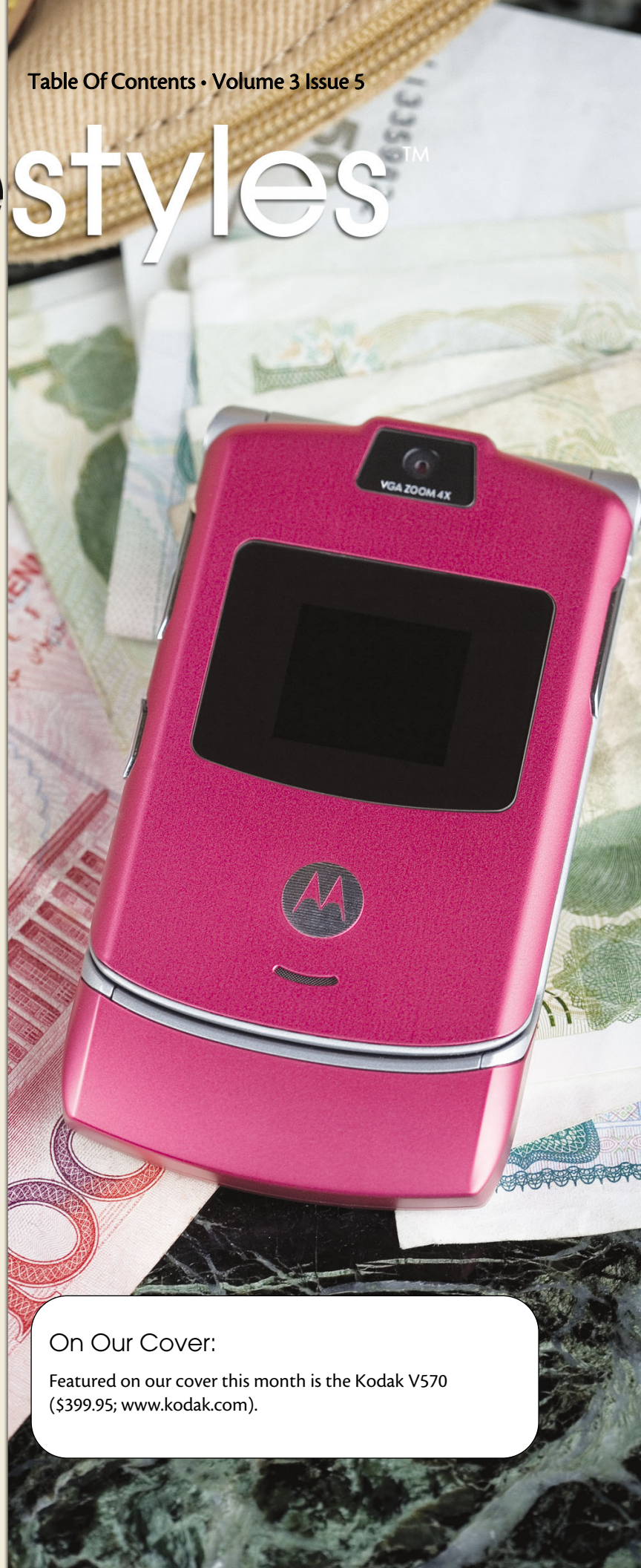
feature topic

CE Gifts For Moms, Dads & Grads

'Tis the season! Between Mom, Dad, and the graduates in your life, spring has become a gift-buying season second only to the year-end holidays. Everyone could use a digital camera, iPod, or laptop tote, but the key is finding the perfect CE device for your loved ones—something they'll find both fun and functional. Graduates can be particularly difficult to buy for, but we'll show you how to send them off in CE style. We also know exactly what Mom will love on May 14, and to prevent any last-minute scrambling, we've got some great ideas for Dad, too. Happy shopping!

- 42 'Tis The Season**
Think CE For Moms, Dads & Grads
- 46 Break With Tradition**
Update Your Mother's Day Gift Ideas
- 50 Get Your Dad Wired This Father's Day**
Gift Ideas For The Hardest Man
In The World To Shop For
- 54 Gifts For Grads**
Grant Your Graduate's Wishes
- 57 Editor's Top 10**
Reasons I Love These Devices
- 58 Lifestyle Close-Up Tips**
Customize Your Gift Wrap

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On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the Kodak V570 (\$399.95; www.kodak.com).



Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *CE Lifestyles*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

18 CE News

22 ShelfWatch

A Look At The Latest Consumer Electronics

24 Outfit Your Life

Accessories With Style

25 Shopping Site Of The Month

Amazon.com (www.amazon.com)

26 His & Hers CE

28 Fab Four



A/V Club

Some of our favorite electronic gadgets are the ones that provide the sounds and pictures that move and entertain us and our friends and family. Whether you want to put together a wireless audio system for your home or just want help using the plasma TV in your living room, A/V Club can help.

30 MP3 Player Shopping Tips

Be A Smart Shopper

32 New Discs On The Block

All You Want To Know About Blu-ray Disc & HD DVD

35 Which Cell Phone Provider Is Right For You?

A Guide To Cell Phone Plans & Phones For Every Lifestyle

38 Keeping News Hounds Happy

RSS Feeds & Podcasts
Keep You Informed 24/7

41 Tips

Tweak Your TV's Settings



Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

60 Best Budget Digital Cameras

A Bundle Of Features For A Bit Of Cash

63 Digital Camera Shopping Tips

Find The Perfect Digicam

64 Questions To Ask

When Buying A Digital Camcorder

65 Photography Technique Tip

This Month: Frozen Motion

66 Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

69 Digital Photo Project

Photo Shadow Box

70 Tips

Photo Size Fundamentals

CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

71 Gift Of The Month

Living Cookbook

72 Keep Your CE Gear Organized

Turn Over A New Leaf

74 Our Favorite CE-Related Products Under \$20

Accessories That Get The Job Done

76 Airports & Your CE

Security Checks Require Special Care For Your Devices

79 Tips

Keep Your CE Dry

CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. Also, read what real women just like you are saying about how consumer electronics are affecting their everyday lives.

80 Music & Movies

82 Games & Gifts

84 What They're Saying

What features do you look for in a digital camera and why?

88 Exit



Editor's Note

There's a person in my life whom I look up to as the earliest of early adopters when it comes to CE devices. This person was the first I knew to have a DVD player. He had the first camera phone I ever saw. And he was the first person I knew who had a DVR and subscribed to TiVo. Is this tech head my 20-year-old brother? Nope. Is he an executive here at my office? Nuh-uh. Is he my friend from MIT? Wrong again.

He is my grandpa.

I thought about my grandpa often as I was putting together this issue; the CE devices we recommend for dads and grandpas in our "Get Your Dad Wired This Father's Day" on page 50 would be perfect for him. And this just reiterates the idea that, no matter who you have to buy for, even if he or she isn't the stereotypical techie guru, you'll always be able to find a CE-related gift that would fit him or her perfectly.

It might seem strange to buy an older person something electronic as a gift, but parents and grandparents are often as enthusiastic about using technology as their younger family members. After all, what do moms, dads, grandmas, grandpas, and high school and college graduates have in common? Not much, except that they all want to maintain a connection to the people they love and care about. And

what better, easier, and more efficient way of doing this than with a cell phone, a digital camera, or a laptop?

And even if the recipient of your thoughtful gift is a little unsure of himself at first, take some time to teach him how to use it; the one-on-one time is a meaningful gift in itself. Though if your grandpa is anything like mine, he'll be the one who is teaching you.

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer
Editor, *CE Lifestyles*
katie-sommer@celifestyles.com



PS: Stay tuned for some exciting changes to the next issue of *CE Lifestyles*.

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No one understands the role of home entertainment furniture better than Salamander Designs, where we devote ourselves to the art. Choose from base modules in various widths and heights. Customize your unit for enclosed storage and/or open shelf space. Add accessories, from a panel TV mount to interior lighting. Then get a comfortable view of it all from one of our lush theater chairs.



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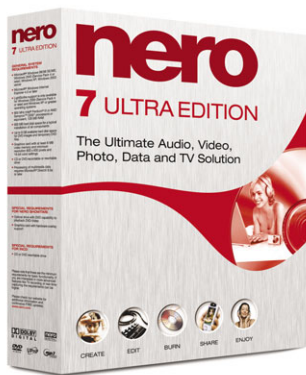
Our World's a Stage



See your many choices, including luxurious seating options, and plan your furniture system on-line at SalamanderOnline.com.
Phone: 888-892-9919

First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.



XACT VISOR SIRIUS Satellite Plug And Play Receiver & Vehicle Kit	6
Pioneer Inno	7
Altec Lansing inMotion iMT1 Audio Dock	8
Sennheiser CX 300	9
SanDisk Sansa e200 Series MP3 Players	10
FujiFilm FinePix F30	11
JVC Everio GZ-MG37 Hard Drive Camcorder	12
PENTAX Optio T10	13
D-Link DSM-520 Wireless HD Media Player	14
Nero 7 Ultra Edition	15
iHome	16



first glimpse

Special Product Section



XACT VISOR SIRIUS Satellite Plug
And Play Receiver & Vehicle Kit
MSRP: \$59.99
www.xactcommunications.com

A Versatile Solution For Your Vehicle

Choosing from among 160 SIRIUS channels can be challenging to the newly liberated, but at least picking the right satellite radio doesn't have to be.

With a compact design and flexible mounting options—combined with good quality for a reasonable \$59.99—the XACT VISOR SIRIUS Satellite Plug And Play Receiver & Vehicle Kit is music to your ears. Mount the receiver on your car's sun visor, dashboard, or windshield, where VISOR's easy-to-read 16-character scrolling display lets you keep an eye both on the road and on your programming options—by channel, number, name, artist, or song title. The optional home kit lets you listen to your favorite channel in your favorite easy chair. No more wondering what you've been listening to! And with one button to rotate the display, you can angle it any way you want.

Other features will help smooth your transition from channel monkey to lounge lizard, like the VISOR's 36-channel preset capability, stereo line level audio outputs, built-in wireless FM transmitter, and wireless IR remote control. And don't forget the vehicle antenna and 12V vehicle power adaptor. Whew!

The VISOR offers a ton of features and performance packed together for a great price. Which leaves you with only a couple of dilemmas: Martha Stewart or Howard? NFL or Lance Armstrong? Oh, well. No one said this was going to be easy.

XACT™

first glimpse

Special Product Section



Pioneer Inno

MSRP: \$399.99

www.pioneerelectronics.com



On The Go Audio

The Pioneer Inno, from Pioneer and XM Satellite Radio, is the next-generation portable XM2go satellite radio receiver that plays live satellite radio "on the go," as well as both MP3 and WMA music files, heralding a major milestone in portable audio.

The Pioneer Inno offers you the long-awaited combination of MP3 and live XM Satellite Radio reception in a sleek, hand-held device.

The wearable radio delivers XM's 160 digital radio channels of commercial-free music and premier sports, news, talk, and entertainment programming live and nationwide.

Inno plays MP3s and WMAs and has a time-shifting memory mode for storage and playback of XM content.

A particularly innovative feature of the Inno lets you bookmark songs heard on XM, connect the Inno to a computer, and instantly purchase the songs from the XM + Napster online service.

The Pioneer Inno has 1GB of memory storage capacity for MP3 files, WMA files, and XM programming, which can store up to 50 hours of content. At only 4.4 ounces, the Inno is extremely light and easy to take along anywhere.

In addition to the XM + Napster feature of the Inno, it has a full-color 180 x 180 TFT display and a user-friendly interface for saving and deleting content. Users can build personal playlists using a mix of XM content and tracks from their own digital music collection. The Inno has a memory buffer to make it easy to store an entire track heard in XM, even if the user starts storing it in the middle of a song.

Inno also has a built-in, wireless FM transmitter that beams XM to any car stereo radio. It offers a personal stock ticker and sport ticker, a category list for saving and playing favorite channels, and the popular TuneSelect feature, which tells you a favorite artist or song whenever it is played on any XM channel.

Inno comes with headphones and all of the accessories needed for portable and home use. Optional accessories sold separately include a vehicle kit, boom boxes, and mini audio systems.

Pioneer
sound.vision.soul

first glimpse

Special Product Section



Altec Lansing inMotion iMT1 Audio Dock

MSRP: \$179.95

www.alteclansing.com

First Mobile Speaker System For Palm Devices

Altec Lansing's inMotion iMT1—the market's first mobile speaker system for Palm devices—is a small audio dock that turns MP3 music files stored on Palm devices into a roomful of sound for headphone-free listening.

The system, which is compatible with the Palm LifeDrive mobile manager, Palm Tungsten T5 and Tungsten E2 handhelds, and Palm Treo 650 smartphones, also charges the device, doubles as a desktop speakerphone for the Treo 650 smartphone, and is slim and trim enough for travel.

Press a button on the front of the iMT1, and a tiny flap rises from the surface to reveal the dock. Pop your device into the slot, attach it via the connector at the bottom of your Palm device, and let the concert begin. The system's Class C digital amplifier powers four 1-inch neodymium micro drivers that reproduce every note, chord, and lick over the entire frequency range. The speakers also incorporate patented MaxxBass technology that delivers the all-important bump of the bass without a subwoofer.

Special Features Include:

- Charging and synchronization of the Palm device through the iMT1 dock. Charging is automatically initiated when the

Palm product is docked and the iMT1 is plugged in. Data transfer can be triggered by connecting the iMT1 to the user's computer via a standard USB 2.0 port on the back of the product and then pressing the Sync button.

- A full-duplex speakerphone, permitting hands-free conversation whenever a Palm Treo smartphone is in the iMT1 dock. The full-duplex feature makes it possible for both parties to hear each other when they are talking simultaneously. Users can switch from music to speakerphone mode by pressing a button on the iMT1 unit. The speakerphone can also be muted to prevent background noise from interfering with the conversation.
- Fold-flat design for easy packing, with a closable dock door that also protects the connector mechanism when the iMT1 is not in use.
- Optional connectivity to other audio devices such as CD, MP3, and portable DVD players through an input jack on the back of the unit.


ALTEC LANSING®
inMotion™
PORTABLE AUDIO

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Special Product Section



Sennheiser CX 300
www.sennheiser.com
MSRP: \$79.99

Listen On The Move

The Sennheiser CX 300s are high-quality stereo ear-canal headphones with powerful, bass-driven stereo sound for listening "on the move." Ear adapters in three different sizes ensure a perfect fit, incredible comfort, and an excellent attenuation of ambient noise. The CX 300s are ideal for use with MP3, CD, MD, or DVD players, as well as many other portable devices.

Other Features Include:

- Powerful, bass-driven stereo sound
- Perfect fit in the ear canal due to ear adapters in different sizes (included in the delivery)
- Excellent attenuation of ambient noise
- Extremely small and lightweight
- Ideal for use with all MP3, CD, DVD, MD players, and portable game systems with 3.5mm headphone sockets
- Asymmetrical cable
- 2-year warranty

 **SENNHEISER**

first glimpse

Special Product Section



SanDisk Sansa e200 Series MP3 Players

MSRP: 2GB e250 is \$199.99; 4GB e260 is \$249.99; 6GB e270 is \$299.99
www.sandisk.com

Download Music, Watch Video & View Photos

The Sansa e200 Series MP3 players are the flagship products of SanDisk's audio line. Created by the leaders in flash memory, this flash-based player provides everything you need for music, photo, and video playback.

The very attractive and sleek design includes a 1.8-inch TFT color screen with advanced navigational features and an easy-to-use interface. You can also avoid scratches and cracks with the durable Liquidmetal backing. The Sansa e200 provides superior sound playback and supports Microsoft's PlaysForSure subscription music. The SanDisk Media Converter supports most image formats to enjoy photos and small personal videos.

The Sansa e200 provides a microSD card slot for content portability and additional capacity with your 2GB, 4GB, or 6GB units.

Features Include:

- Sleek, thin design with large 1.8-inch TFT color screen for easy viewing
- Strong Liquidmetal back casing provides excellent durability and scratch resistance
- Simple to use, backlit controls for fast device interface navigation
- User-replaceable and rechargeable Li-Ion battery gives you up to 20 hours of battery life
- Features microSD expansion slot for additional memory capacity
- Supports SanDisk TrustedFlash and Gruvi content cards
- Digital FM tuner, on-the-fly FM recording and voice recording
- Supports Subscription Music Stores

SanDisk 

first glimpse

Special Product Section

FujiFilm FinePix F30
MSRP: \$400
www.fujifilm.com
Available in May



Capture The Moment As Your Eyes See It

Blurry images are the most common complaint of digital camera users. The FinePix F30's new Picture Stabilization mode eliminates blur due to subject movement and camera shake; even in low-light backgrounds. Simply select the Picture Stabilization icon on the dial on top of the FinePix F30, and you're ready to shoot. Picture Stabilization automates professional photographic techniques to deliver clear images with true color and fine detail.

Power Play

Now your digital camera will last longer than you thanks to an extended life Li-Ion battery. The FinePix F30 delivers an astonishing 500 shots per charge, which means you're always ready for that next photo opportunity. And then simply connect the camera to the AC adapter to recharge and be ready for your next party, wedding, vacation, or any other picture-taking occasion.

Easily Frame & Share Shots

The FinePix F30 makes it easy to frame your shot and share your memories with a high-resolution LCD. The 2.5-inch LCD

has 230,000 pixel resolution and a fast refresh rate, giving you smooth, clear viewing in high-resolution color. The LCD adjusts image brightness to surrounding light levels automatically. For added control in darker settings, simply press the one-touch Manual Gain to increase the LCD brightness for better viewing.

Form & Function

The FinePix F30 is the camera you'll grow with. A super compact-designed, all-metal body is our newly designed L-line chassis, which offers structural durability that fits easily in your pocket. And whatever mode you choose, the F30 fits any ability level and grows with your skills as a digital photographer. This multifunctional digital camera even records movies at an astounding 30 frames per second.



first glimpse

Special Product Section



JVC Everio GZ-MG37
Hard Drive Camcorder
MSRP: \$800
www.jvc.com

Just Keep On Shooting!

JVC's Everio is designed to eliminate your worries. Just keep on shooting because the built-in large-capacity hard drive stores hours and hours of your video inside a lightweight compact camcorder. You can also shoot thousands of digital still images. So whether you're at home or on the go, you'll always be ready to record or playback your memories.

JVC's Everio G Series camcorders, the world's first hard drive camcorders, eliminate the need to carry tapes, discs, or any media at all, yet can record up to seven hours of DVD movie-quality video or more than 10 hours at DVD camcorder-quality video on a built-in hard disc drive.

Other advantages of hard-drive video recording include the ability to quickly locate desired material, to effortlessly delete unwanted material, and to easily rearrange playback sequence.

The GZ-MG37 offers built-in DVD burner control allowing it to be directly connected to an optional JVC DVD burner, the CU-VD10 Share Station (around \$200).

The camcorder connects to the burner via a USB cable, and the burner is easily controlled by the camcorder. Everio MOD files are converted to the DVD Video format, and the Share Station creates discs that can be played on most DVD players.

When transferring Everio footage to a computer, transfer speed has been significantly improved, taking approximately half as long to transfer data as the original Everio G Series models. One hour of Ultra model video, about 4GB, now takes about five minutes to transfer, which gives you more time to create your movie memories.

JVC

The Perfect Experience /

first glimpse

Special Product Section



PENTAX Optio T10
MSRP: under \$350
www.pentax.com

Touch, Shoot, Enjoy!

A big LCD and no buttons means fun for the whole family. The PENTAX Optio T10 offers an impressive 3-inch LCD touch-display for trouble-free operation. Featuring 6MP and a 3X optical zoom, the Optio T10 is slim and stylish, offers finger and stylus touch control, and allows users to decorate images with drawings, stamps, and picture frames.

The impressive 230,000-pixel, 3-inch touch-panel LCD makes capturing, editing, and sharing your images easier than ever.

The intuitive touch panel provides simple, trouble-free operation. Use the included stylus for logical feature navigation via the capture and Playback mode palettes.

The Optio T10 has exceptional image quality thanks to a 6MP CCD, 3X optical smc PENTAX lens, and high-performance ASIC.

And best of all you can have fun while you shoot and share your photos! Decorate your images with the creative Drawing Function, Stamp Modes, Image Cut-Out, and built-in Picture Frames.

Ultra-slim and stylish, the simple, elegant design features a high-quality aluminum alloy exterior. Effortlessly slip it into a pocket or your purse. The high-quality extended movie feature captures QuickTime motion JPEG (640 x 480) at 30fps with a range of built-in editing functions.

PENTAX®

first glimpse

Special Product Section

D-Link DSM-520 Wireless HD Media Player

MSRP: \$249.99

www.dlink.com



The High-Definition Difference

Experience the high-definition difference with the D-Link MediaLounge Wireless HD Media Player, where you can stream music, photos, and high-definition videos to your home entertainment system. The DSM-520 connects to your existing home network using either 802.11g wireless technology or an Ethernet cable.

The DSM-520 Wireless HD Media Player supports your favorite media formats, including high-definition video in either Windows Media Video 9 or MPEG-4 format. Enjoy videos with resolutions of up to 1080i for the best picture quality from your high-definition television.

For compatible television systems, the DSM-520 features a HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) connection. HDMI offers a pure digital connection for both audio and video. Other video connectors include component, S-video, and composite output, ensuring compatibility with virtually all televisions. The DSM-520 also supports coax and optical digital audio output for delivering high-fidelity, digital surround sound.

D-Link has partnered with premium online service providers to offer access to a vast array of online radio stations and music download services. You can use the Windows

Media Connect feature of Window XP SP2 to playback files protected by WMDRM (Windows Media Digital Rights Management) on the DSM-520. Access your entire library of premium downloaded songs and videos directly from your MediaLounge Wireless HD Media Player.

The DSM-520 Wireless HD Media Player includes a USB 2.0 port in the front panel for instant access to music, photos, and videos stored on removable USB flash drives or hard drives.

A built-in Setup Wizard makes setting up the DSM-520 simple. Configuring the wireless settings is made even easier with Windows Connect Now. Simply run the Wireless Network Setup Wizard from Windows XP SP2, and transfer the wireless settings to the DSM-520 using a USB flash drive.

A sleek 17-inch black aluminum chassis with smoked mirror front panel houses the DSM-520. The stylish Wireless HD Media Player blends in with your other home entertainment devices, making your home-theater setup complete.

D-Link®
Building Networks for People

first glimpse

Special Product Section



Nero 7 Ultra Edition

MSRP: \$99.99 in

box; \$79.99

download

www.nero.com

The Ultimate Audio, Video, Photo, Data & TV Solution

Nero 7 Ultra Edition allows you to capture, create, edit, author, burn, back up, and share while providing the complete home entertainment experience. Create entertaining slideshows of your photos and videos, edit your home videos with animated 3D menu templates for professional-quality DVDs, burn a backup of non-copy protected DVDs, convert your audio and video files into MPEG-4 (Nero Digital™) and share on consumer electronics devices, or burn on CD/DVD/BD/HD DVD. Manage your media files with a click of your remote control with new Nero Home media manager. Includes 18 applications in ONE powerful solution.

Nero 7 Ultra Edition is available from www.nero.com or from participating retailers such as Best Buy (www.bestbuy.com), Fry's (www.frys.com), CompUSA (www.compusa.com), Office Depot (www.officedepot.com), Circuit City (www.circuitcity.com), and Amazon.com.

nero

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Special Product Section

iHome

MSRP: \$99.95

www.ihomedirect.com

(800) 925-6224



The Home System For Your iPod

Wake up to *your* music.

The new iHome iH5 wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod music.

The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound.

It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

The iH5 is great in any room in the house. Try one in your kitchen or home office.

Features:

- Clean, contemporary design complements the look of your iPod
- Wake to your iPod, AM/FM radio, or buzzer
- Removable dock inserts fit all docking iPods*, and unit charges your iPod while docked

first glimpse

Special Product Section



- Adjust preset time to any of seven different time zones with one button; clock also adjusts for daylight savings time automatically
- Gentle wake and gradual sleep lulls you to sleep and allows for a less startling wake-up
- Stereo drivers in specially designed Reson8™ speaker chambers deliver astounding clarity, depth, and power

iHome™
the home system for your iPod®

iPod not included.

*iPod shuffle must use in-line jack.

iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries. iHome and Reson8 are trademarks of SDI Technologies, Inc.

ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

"Oprah & Friends" Joins XM Satellite Radio

The queen of talk television is coming to radio. Harpo Radio, owned by TV talk show host Oprah Winfrey, has signed a three-year deal that will create an "Oprah & Friends" channel on XM Satellite Radio. The channel will debut in September.

Personalities from "The Oprah Winfrey Show," including Gayle King, Bob Greene, and Dr. Robin Smith, will provide original daily programming for the channel on topics such as current events, nutrition, fitness, and self-improvement. King and Winfrey also will team up to do an original weekly reality show on the channel.

Lenovo PCs & Notebooks Enter U.S. Market

Last year computer maker Lenovo (www.lenovo.com) bought IBM's Personal Computing Division. As a result of that acquisition, the China-based company leapt onto the global computing stage, positioning it as the world's third-largest manufacturer of computers. Dell (www.dell.com) and HP (www.hp.com) are first and second, respectively.

Lenovo continues to manufacture the IBM line of ThinkPad notebooks, and now for the first time, Lenovo-branded desktop PCs and notebooks have entered the U.S. market. This is Lenovo's first foray into a market outside of China.

The new notebooks are in the Lenovo 3000 line. The first model, the C100 (starting at \$599), shipped in early March, with the N100 and V100 models to follow. The J Series desktop is available with either the J105 tower (starting at \$349) or the J100 tower (starting at \$499). Monitors and office suites are sold separately. Although most of the units will be sold through resellers and the company's Web site, according to a company spokesman, Office Depot also will stock the Lenovo brand.



Snapfish Adds Digital Video Service To Site



Customers of Snapfish (www.snapfish.com) now can use the site to upload, view, share, and store their digital videos captured with digital cameras and cell phones. Snapfish is the first major online photo service to offer these video support features.

Registered customers don't need to use or download special software in order to access Snapfish's video tools. They can simply upload the movie file to Snapfish.com through their account page or email the movie clips to save@mynapfish.com. Movie files, which can be up to 10 minutes long, must be in MOV, AVI, or MP1 format.

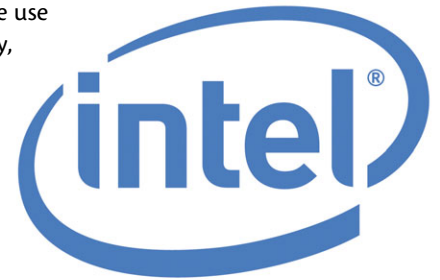
The home-video service is available to customers for a free one-month trial. After that, the service costs \$2.99 a month or \$24.99 a year for unlimited space, so you can view, store, and share your movie clips.

Intel Expands Its "Teach To The Future" Initiative

Intel, the world's largest computer chip manufacturer, has announced plans to train 10 million teachers in developing nations in the use of technology, so they can enhance learning in their classrooms.

The goal is to complete the teacher training within five years. The company also said it will donate 100,000 PCs to classrooms in developing countries.

This teacher-training plan is part of Intel's "Teach To The Future" initiative, which was started in 2000. Since then, more than 3 million teachers in 35 countries have received training.

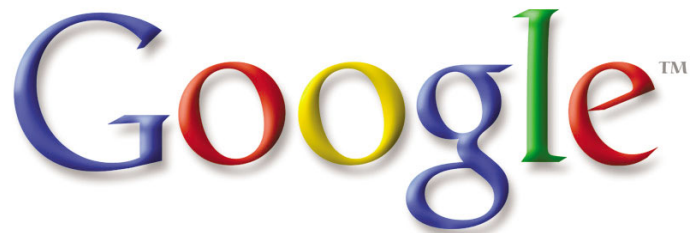


Public Disapproves Of Search Engine Query Storage

Last year the Bush administration issued subpoenas to four companies—Google (www.google.com), Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com), AOL (www.aol.com), and Microsoft Network (www.msn.com)—seeking information on all the search terms users entered in those sites in any given week and, additionally, for the URLs of 1 million random Web pages stored in the search engine's databases. The government's request is part of an effort to revive the COPA (Child Online Protection Act), which Congress passed in 1998 to replace the Communications Decency Act. The Supreme Court, in a 9-0 decision, ruled the latter was unconstitutional in 1997.

COPA attempts to restrict access by minors to material commercially distributed on the Web that has been deemed harmful to minors. The law was found unconstitutional in a trial court, and the Third Circuit Court of Appeals agreed. In 2002 the Supreme Court reversed the Third Court's ruling, returning the case to the lower court for further deliberation of the First Amendment issues raised by COPA.

Yahoo!, AOL, and Microsoft Network at least partially complied with the Bush administration's request, but Google refused. So in March U.S. District Court Judge James Ware ruled that



Google must partially comply with the request. Ware, however, dramatically reduced the scope of the government's request from 1 million random Web pages to 50,000.

The government's request raises concerns about privacy: How much information is the government entitled to, and why are the search engines permanently storing this information?

According to a poll conducted by the Center for Survey Research at the University of Connecticut, half of the public opposes the

request for the information: 50% say the companies should not turn over the search queries, while 44% say they should. The pollsters say that this margin of difference is the same for Internet and non-Internet users.

A greater majority of those surveyed, however, 60%, say they oppose the search engines permanently storing the search behaviors of their users, while only 32% support that. In addition, more than 50% are either "not too confident" or "not at all confident" that their search behaviors will remain private.

Digital Audio Players Top List Of Fastest-Growing CE Devices

Market research firm In-Stat (www.in-stat.com) projects that the fastest-growing consumer electronics device from 2003 to 2009 will be portable digital audio players, with a 57% combined annual growth rate. LCD TVs (52.3%) and DVD recorders (51.4%) are also expected to see tremendous growth.

In-Stat predicts analog TVs (-15.3%) and standalone fax machines (-13.9%) will see the biggest declines over the same period.

Worldwide Market For PDAs Declines

The global market for handheld PDAs declined in 2005, marking the fourth year in a row that market has dropped, according to research firm IDC. About 7.5 million PDAs shipped last year, a decline of 16.7% from the previous year.

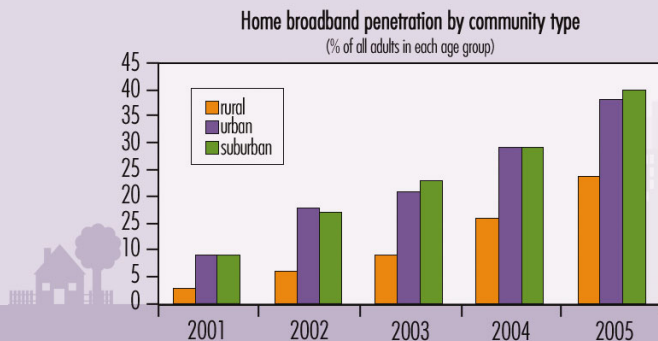
Top 5 Handheld PDA Vendors

Vendor	Q4 2005 Market Share	Q4 2004 Market Share
1. Palm	45.6%	43%
2. HP	20.8%	25.4%
3. Dell	8%	7.2%
4. Acer	5.7%	2.2%
5. Medion	4.3%	4.2%
6. Others	15.6%	18%

Rural America Closes Broadband Gap

At the end of 2005, 24% of rural Americans had broadband Internet access at home, according to a survey from the Pew Internet & American Life Project. That still trails the 39% of Americans living in urban and suburban areas who have broadband access at home.

However, the gap between rural and urban broadband users has narrowed. At the end of 2003, only 9% of rural Americans had broadband access, less than half of the 22% of city dwellers who had broadband access then.



tidbits

Consumers bought 420 million single **music downloads** in 2005; that's 20 times the number of paid-for single downloads in 2003.

Source: IFPI (International Federation of the Phonographic Industry)

Digital camera makers shipped 28 million cameras to retailers in 2005, a **21% increase** over units shipped in 2004.

Source: IDC

More than 33% of Wi-Fi users say they use only free Wi-Fi connections; 18.9% use Wi-Fi exclusively at home or at work; and **60% of travelers** who use Wi-Fi make some or all of their travel decisions based on Wi-Fi availability.

Source: In-Stat

816.6 million **mobile phones** were sold worldwide in 2005, up 21% from 2004.

Source: Gartner

Gartner analyst Hugues de la Vergne predicts that **more than 60% of mobile phones** sold in North America in 2006 likely will have cameras.

Source: Gartner

Wake up to your music.

The new iHome iH5™ wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod® music. The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound. It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

iHome is home base.

iHome iH5

To order, visit

www.ihomedirect.com

Or call toll free

1.800.925.6224

30 day risk-free trial!



For all docking iPods*
including nano!



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iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple
Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries.
*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.

iHome™
www.ihomedirect.com

shelfwatch

These
innovative
products
go beyond
what we see
every day,
and the
benefits
seem, well,
obvious.



Garmin iQue 3000

\$426.65 • www.garmin.com

PDAs are good. GPS is, too. Put them both together, you have a new iQue. In a no-brainer combination for those who spend a lot of time traveling, the iQue stores your calendar and address book and can also tell you exactly how to get to that next lunch appointment or soccer game from wherever you are.



Otterbox for nano or video iPod

\$39.95 nano, \$49.95 video iPod • www.otterbox.com

Don't be afraid to take your tunes to the beach this summer. The Otterbox line of drop-resistant and waterproof iPod cases keeps your player safe and dry while preserving Click Wheel control and access for any headphones you care to use.

PENTAX Optio T10

\$349.95 • www.pentaximaging.com

Say goodbye to tedious menu navigation using directional pads and toggle buttons. The newest Optio's LCD isn't just bright and large (3 inches); it's also a touchscreen (for fingers or styli).



Sanyo Xacti HD1

\$799.99 • www.sanyo.com

There are a handful of HD camcorders out there, but not many record to easily interchangeable SD-card media or cost less than \$1,000, which makes the HD1 pretty attractive. It sports a bright and fast OLED (organic light-emitting diode) display, includes a 10X optical zoom lens, and comes with a docking station for charging and up-loading footage.

Pioneer Inno

\$399.99 (plus \$12.95 monthly XM subscription) • www.pioneerelectronics.com

Portable satellite radio is one thing, but recordable portable satellite radio is something else altogether. The Inno lets you record 50 hours of your favorite XM programming and includes 1GB of memory for MP3 playback, as well.



open

outfit your life

Accessories With Style

May Flowers

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE

LaCie Skwarim USB Drive

\$199.99 • www.lacie.com

New York designer Karim Rashid brings fashion to the USB drive for LaCie, producing the Skwarim. This 60GB drive is blue as a May afternoon, clad in a tactile, rubberized shell. It's also Hi-Speed USB 2.0-compliant, compatible across platforms, and fits in the palm of your hand.



Vaja Leather Suit Crystal for Motorola RAZR

\$240 • www.vajacases.com

Around the turn of the year, we ran Vaja's Crystal iPod case in this column. Now you can get one for your Motorola RAZR V3. Vaja uses unaltered, full-grain Argentinean cowhide sprinkled with Swarovski crystals. You can get it in six color combinations, each handmade to order.



Lindsay Laptop Sleeve Tote

\$45 • www.maverydesigns.com

This blooming laptop tote is designed and handmade by Megan Avery of M. Avery Designs in Hoboken, N.J. As Avery notes, "the Lindsay is not meant to be the sole protection for your laptop." But it gives enough padding to brighten up a quick Saturday morning trip to the coffee shop.



Ridibundus Emoticon Pillow Set

approx. \$20 • www.artlebedev.com/portfolio/ridibundus

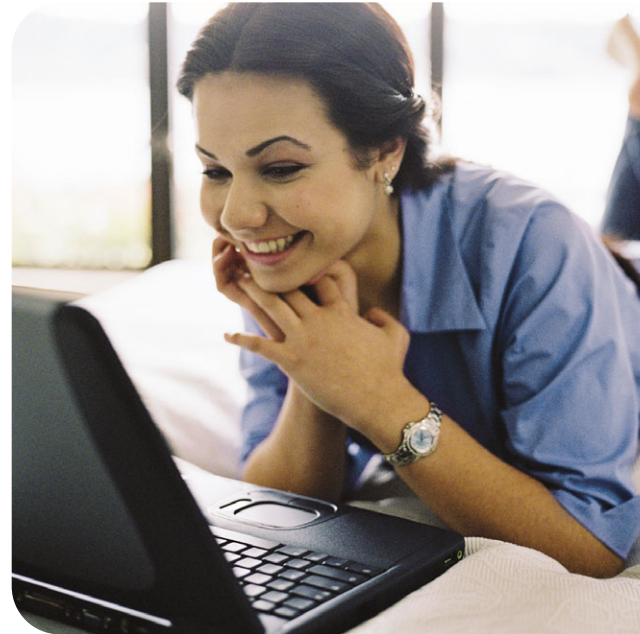
Brighten your space with a set of six colorful "emoticon" pillows from Art.Lebedev Studio. You might think the largest high-art house in Russia might favor stark, humorless, Dostoyevskian designs, but let's face it: Even a frowny face feels like a laugh in lime green.



Shopping Site Of The Month

Amazon.com

www.amazon.com



If you love online shopping as much as we do, chances are you know the wonders of Amazon.com. But, do you really know *everything* this site has to offer? We wanted to be sure you did, so this month we decided to tackle Amazon.com. But we're going beyond the home page, so log on with us and discover two of our favorite features.

Before starting, register as a user. Although you can browse to your heart's content without registering, you won't be able to use the advanced features we cover in this article. To register, click the Start Here link under the header on the home page. Follow the prompts, enter your information, and click Continue to begin your Amazon.com experience.

My Store

Who wouldn't appreciate a personal shopper to help select merchandise tailored to her tastes? We know we would. The My Store feature on Amazon.com is a virtual version of a personal shopper. The feature selects its recommendations based on items you buy at Amazon.com and information you entered during the Recommendations Wizard step when you registered. (The wizard launches after you click Continue, as we did above. However, you may complete this step later and update your selections any time.) This information is compared to data gathered from other customers to suggest items you might like.


The first Recommended list that you get will likely need tweaking for it to match your likes and dislikes. If you have time, review at least the first few pages of your list. (Our list seemed to go on forever.) Use the I Own It, Not Interested, and Rate It features at the end of each listing to help the list along, and this feature may introduce you to products you may not have discovered otherwise.

Wish List

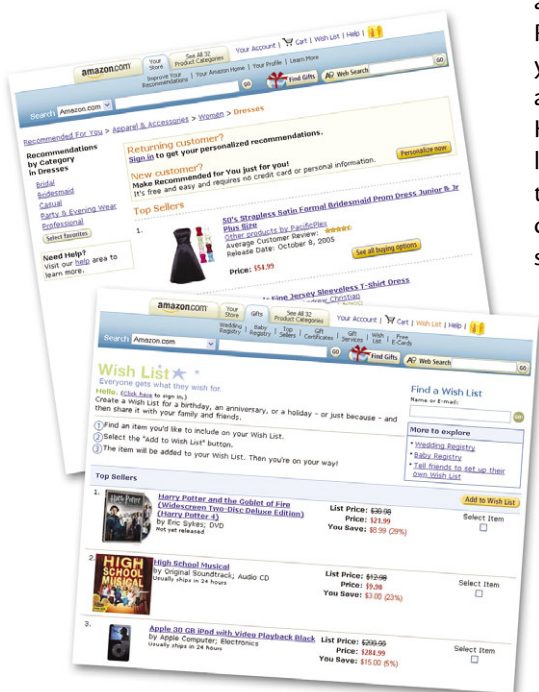
Tired of having to return all of your birthday presents to get what you really want? Give your loved ones a fighting chance to get it right this year by creating a Wish List. To get started, click the Add To Wish List button on the page of any item you fancy.

After you've created a Wish List, you can share it with the world, so anyone who searches for you can see your list. You can also share it only with friends or keep it to yourself, so no one else can view it. Click Edit This Information at the top right of your Wish List page to make your selection. You can also enter your birthday and shipping address in the area, so friends and family can have your perfect gift mailed directly to you. (For security reasons, visitors who view your list will see your city and state but not your street address.)

Jump In

Now that you're a little more familiar with two of the best features Amazon.com has to offer, all there is left to do is shop, drop a few hints, and see where it leads. 

BY JOY MARTIN





Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.

His . . .

At the rate CE devices are thinning, naming them after shockingly underweight celebrities might not be a terrible idea. Think about it. The Sharp Nicole Ritchie flat panel LCD. The Apple iPod nano Lindsay Lohan Edition. I'm eagerly awaiting the Mary-Kate Olsen digital camera's debut.


Motorola has jumped on the skinny bandwagon, too, and it's treated consumers to one of the thinnest cell phones on the market—the RAZR V3c (\$369.99; www.motorola.com). In addition to its lean physique, the RAZR V3c has a load of features, and Bluetooth connectivity lets you add a Bluetooth-enabled headset.

But unlike most other CE products, I like my cell phones simple: I want to place calls and know who's calling me. If I can't answer a call, the caller should be able to leave me a voicemail. Beyond that, everything else is a frivolous feature I could do without. I have yet to meet a phone that knows some sort of magic trick that would make me shun Ol' Reliable (Samsung's now prehistoric SPH-A500).

I placed a few calls with the RAZR V3c (our phone used Verizon Wireless) to compare its call quality with a Palm Treo 700w, which also had Verizon Wireless. Although the RAZR V3c seemed to present incoming call quality slightly more clearly (the Treo 700w sounded dull and muted), I experienced a troublesome buzz when I spoke into the V3c. The Treo 700w didn't exhibit this, but the problem may have as much to do with Verizon Wireless's local service as it does with the RAZR V3c itself.

Despite wanting extra bells and whistles on my cell phone about as much as Enron's accountants preparing my tax return, I also took the RAZR V3c integrated 1.3MP digital camera for a spin. The camera's below-average contrast wasn't a surprise (what can you expect from a cell phone's digicam?), but I liked its resolution. The RAZR V3c's camera should be sufficient for capturing and emailing those blink-and-you-missed-it events such as your niece's first steps.

The RAZR V3c's svelte frame and copious (yet according to my philosophy, superfluous) extras shouldn't overshadow its real strength: EVDO (Evolution for Data Optimized) capability. This slick feature enables a connection to the Internet at speeds that are comparable to broadband Internet access. EVDO is the secret behind Verizon's nifty VCast service, and seeing how phones harness this emerging technology is tantalizing. There are few phones available with this feature, so you can get in on the ground floor with the RAZR V3c.

If you think thin in is in and are shopping around for a cell phone upgrade, the RAZR V3c is a capable, yet slender phone. But until I catch myself asking, "Can you hear me now?" I'll stick with Ol' Reliable. 

BY VINCE COGLEY



& Hers CE

I was once that person who was simply happy to have a working cell phone. I didn't mind that my cell weighed so much that I could get a good arm workout between calls or that it was so unattractive that I had to keep it in my purse for fear of being laughed at by the tech stylish. I couldn't take pictures with my old cell phone, watch the weather report, or check my email, but I didn't mind because my calls came in loud and clear.

Now that I'm doing arm curls every day at the gym, I figured it was time for a new, lighter cell phone. I needed something that was not only lighter, but also smaller than my previous cell phone. And this time style mattered. I wanted something chic: A cell phone that I could proudly set out at a friend's house instead of hiding it in my purse. A cell phone that she would marvel at because of its sleek design and versatility. A cell phone she would go out and purchase the next day because it was just that cool.

That cell phone is the Motorola RAZR V3c. It's stylish (a charcoal-gray color), thin (3.86 x 0.08 x 0.57 inches [HxWxD]), weighs next to nothing (3.5 ounces), and just begs to be taken out of your purse or pocket for all to see. But, be careful when you whip this phone out of your purse because that's just what I did a couple of times and the skinny thing slipped right through my fingers and plunged to the ground. Fortunately, the RAZR's a solidly built phone able to withstand multiple drops.

The RAZR functions pretty well, too. Not only do I frequently take pictures with the 1.3MP (megapixel) camera, but I also use the phone to access the Internet to check my Gmail, download ringtones, and occasionally watch the weather forecast.

The camera is decent, but I only use it to take snapshots that end up attached to one of my contacts. For instance, when my friend Vicki calls, the picture I took of "the face my fiancée hates" comes up on the RAZR's external screen.

If you're a Verizon Wireless customer, getting new ringtones, Pix, Flix, and games is as easy as going to the Menu, selecting the Get It Now tab, and choosing from one of the numbered selections. Of course, everything you download will cost you, but it's worth it to hear Matisyahu every time someone calls. Verizon Wireless customers must subscribe to Mobile Web 2.0 to check their email or watch the news. But, once again, paying an extra \$5 per month was worth it for me because I'm always on the go and often need Web access.

So I bought a new cell phone to show off. And why not? It's flashy, makes a good conversation piece, and has tons of extras, and conversations come in clearly. Even better yet, I can flaunt this cell phone with just one hand. **CE**

BY TRISTA KUNCE

Motorola RAZR V3c
\$369.99
www.motorola.com



Fab Four

This month we've singled out four fabulous products that impressed us with their attention to detail and/or technological innovation. We'll give you a first look at a mobile TV phone so new you can't even get one yet, as well as the first dual-lens point-and-shoot digital camera to hit the market. We'll also introduce you to a CE gem that will be a girl-jock's new best friend, and when it's all over, we'll invite you to sit down in front of an LCD TV that really is as smart as it looks.

digital camera



Kodak EasyShare V570

\$399.95 • www.kodak.com

digital camera

Why: Kodak is known for the ease of use of its digital cameras, and the EasyShare V570 is no exception. It does, however, break some new ground by incorporating two lenses, which give it both ultra wide-angle (23mm) and 5X optical zoom capabilities. This 5MP camera isn't burdened by the clunky design of some earlier EasyShare models. Its body is thin, and its lines are crisp. Among its special tools is a Favorites feature, which lets you flag photos, so you can quickly access the best of the best for printing or sharing later. You'll also be able to edit video on-camera and print from video. Like the other cameras in the EasyShare line, the V570 is compatible with EasyShare printers, which take computers and traditional printers out of the loop. If you're upgrading from an older EasyShare camera, you should be able to use your existing EasyShare printer without any trouble.

Bottom line: An affordable digicam that takes point-and-shoot to a whole new level.

mp3 player



Philips PSA 232/37

\$119.99 • www.philips.com

mp3 player

Why: The folks at Philips may not have thought of a catchy name for this sports audio player, but they *did* think of women athletes when they crafted the PSA 232/37. Its 512MB capacity will hold roughly 250 songs, enough to supply a satisfying depth of choices to suit your shifting workout moods. If that isn't enough, it also includes an FM radio tuner, so you can get your fill of NPR, classic rock, or whatever floats your boat. Specifically designed with sporty types in mind, its circular design makes it easy to cup in a palm when jogging, and the talking stopwatch and "no-look" rocking lens make it easier to keep your eyes on the prize and off the player's music controls. Because the PSA 232/37 is a durable flash player, it's guaranteed to be skip-free. You can jump, flip, and tumble if you want to, and your music will keep on grooving.

Bottom Line: An easy-to-handle flash drive built for sport.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

phone



phone

Why: Mobile TV technology is picking up steam, particularly in Europe and Asia, which means it's only a matter of time before we'll be watching "Desperate Housewives" or "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" on our mobile phones. Samsung's latest iteration in its satellite DMB (Digital Multimedia Broadcasting) line of phones is, as 9-year-old Bailey Graychase in Maine put it, "wicked cool." Users can rotate the LCD screen 90 degrees for landscape or standard view to get the best view possible. The phone also incorporates a 2MP camera, 256MB TransFlash memory, a TV output function, and wireless printing capabilities. Samsung claims a battery life of three hours of continuous viewing. This phone was released in the Korean market more than a year ago, but for now, Samsung seems to be saying to Americans, "look but don't touch." The SCH-B200 debuted at CES to strong reviews, but is not expected to be available to American consumers until later this year.

Bottom Line: This cutting-edge 3G phone is one to watch out for.

wild card



wild card

Why: When it comes to thinking about what women really want, we give Sony high marks. The 40-inch Bravia LCD Flat Panel HDTV is among the best examples of Sony's attention to its female demographic. Designed with both men and women in mind, Bravia combines ease-of-use, full functionality, high quality, and exciting design. Particular attention was given to the speakers; they're tastefully concealed so as not to be obtrusive. Its WEGA Engine minimizes distortion, and its Gate Easy Operation Guide makes navigating various menus a cinch. If you want to view the latest viral video on a big screen or give a larger-than-life digital slideshow, the PC input lets you use Bravia as a giant monitor for your PC. The integrated HDTV means Bravia is fully capable of supplying you with all of the perks of digital programming right out of the box. And mothers concerned about the viewing habits of their children can take advantage of the Parental Control (V-Chip) feature.

Bottom Line: A gorgeous top-of-the-line LCD flat panel TV.

The Camera:
Kodak EasyShare V570

\$399.95

www.kodak.com

The MP3 Player:
Philips PSA 232/37

\$119.99

www.philips.com

The Phone:
Samsung SCH-B200

\$TBA

www.samsung.com

The Wild Card:
Sony 40-inch BRAVIA XBR LCD Flat Panel HDTV KDL-V40XBR1

\$3,499.99

www.sonystyle.com

MP3 Player Shopping Tips

Be A Smart Shopper

BY KATIE SOMMER

Ready to buy an MP3 player? There are a lot to choose from, which is both good (you'll certainly find one that's perfect for you) and not so good (it's overwhelming!). Here are some shopping tips that will help you make the best decision, and we also provide a shopping checklist and an area where you can make some notes of your own.

Before you shop, take some time to note when you want to listen to music and why. Do you like your tunes in your bedroom, kitchen, and living room? If so, an MP3 player with an optional stereo dock would be a good choice. Do you want to use it while working out? Then a flash-based player is your best bet. These observations might make you consider some players that you might not have before.

Even if you want to buy online, make sure you visit an electronics store to physically handle the MP3 player. Put it in your purse; stick it in your pocket; hold it in your hand. Is it heavy? Light? Comfortable to hold? A magnet for fingerprints and grime? Spending some in-person time with these different devices will help you make the best decision.

Make sure you do research by reading magazines such as *CE Lifestyles*, but you should also ask your friends, family, and co-workers what they like about their own MP3 players. Word-of-mouth, firsthand recommendations are priceless.

Always take a pen or pencil and a small notebook when you comparison shop. Starting a new page for each store you visit makes reviewing your notes much easier once you're home.

It's true that you can often find better deals online, but there's no substitute for buying in a brick-and-mortar store. Buying your MP3 player at Best Buy, for instance, ensures that you have the exact model you want, and its return and exchange policies are usually much easier to deal with than one from an online store.

Always test out the player before you buy it. Bring your own earphones if you're planning on using those or ask to use the ones that come with the model to see if they're comfortable. Make sure you like how you'll have to use the controls and be sure the screen is easy to read.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ Check For Size

Does it easily fit in your purse or tote?

☐ Check For Weight

Will it be too heavy to comfortably carry to the gym, a soccer game, and the mall?

☐ Decide On Storage Capacity

You can buy as little as 256MB memory, or you could buy 100GB or more.

☐ Comparison Shop

How much does it cost at Best Buy? Amazon.com? Target?

☐ Read Return Policies

Read return policies before you buy in case something goes wrong after you get it home.

☐ Know The Memory Type

Hard drive-based players have moving parts and are often heavier; flash-based players are light but don't offer as much space.

☐ Notes



Let the music find *

Anywhere in your home, indoors or out, there can be music. Or sports. Or news.
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All you need to know is Russound.



RNET®

RNET is a proprietary platform that allows
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Russound



New Discs On The Block

All You Want To Know About Blu-ray Disc & HD DVD


CD+R; CD-RW; CD+RW; DVD-R; DVD+RW; and on and on. It took a lot of us a while to get a firm grasp on what all the acronyms, letters, pluses, and minuses stand for in today's line of recordable and rewritable media meant, and now, it is all about to change. Instead of worrying about whether DVD+RW media will work in your optical drive or if you can burn a DVD-R DL (dual-layer DVD-R) on your new PC, a new list of compatibility concerns will come about in the near future. The popularity of HDTV has exploded in the past couple of years, and the discs you play on your HDTV have to keep up. Two formats have distanced themselves from the others in the race for next-generation optical disc supremacy—BDs (Blu-ray discs) and HD

DVDs. Let's take a look at how these discs were developed, how they work, and what they mean for the future of your computer and home theater.

In The Beginning

Though these two formats are battling it out for our affection, they actually share surprisingly similar histories and technologies. Here's a little background: Way back when, CDs gave us a huge jump in storage space, and the digital technology implemented in creating these discs led to sound that was much better than what was on cassette tapes. Eventually, nearly all of us (either by choice or by force) made the switch to CDs, and we still love the 700MB of storage space the CD can hold, if not for music, then for data we can write to CD-R/RWs.

In the '90s, the industry began developing the next line of optical disc technology, a disc that is the same size as the CD but that can hold about 10 times more information: the DVD. Though the CD still has enough space to hold high-quality audio, the standard DVD has worked well for our favorite movies, holding up to 4.7GB of data, and in the case of double-layer DVDs, 8.5GB.

With the advent of HDTV, consumers are now looking for an option that lets them play their favorite flicks in HD, which uses up a lot more room than SD video. Enter BDs and HD DVDs. These discs offer a much larger storage capacity by using a different-colored laser than conventional DVDs (blue vs. red). Because these discs have so much storage space available, they can keep up with the high demands of HD video, something DVDs just can't do. In the next two pages, we'll give you the low-down on both BDs and HD DVDs, and we'll tell you what you can expect in the near future in both your home and at your electronics retailer. 

BY SAM EVANS



Blu Skies Ahead?

Blu-ray discs get their name from the tool that is used to write them, a blue-violet optical laser (also known as a ray).

The storage capabilities of both CDs and DVDs are dwarfed by a single-layer BD, which can hold 25GB; double-layer BDs hold 50GB. (As we said before, a CD can hold 700MB data, and a DVD can hold 4.7GB data.) In terms of video, a standard single-layer 25GB BD can hold 4.5 hours of HD content or over 11 hours of standard-quality content. Compare that to a DVD, which can only hold about two hours of standard-definition content.

So how does the technology of BDs work? DVDs and CDs use red lasers to write information to discs. Red lasers have a wavelength of about 650 nanometers. BDs use a blue-violet laser that has a wavelength of about 405 nanometers. Because the wavelength of the blue laser is shorter, it lets the laser write or read from a much smaller space. This enables Blu-ray discs to store more than five times the amount of information than their DVD predecessors on a disc of the same size.

At press time, Blu-ray players still hadn't been released on the U.S. market (though Sony says its Vaio laptops will be equipped with BD drives "some-time mid-year"), but when they are, they'll be quite pricey at first, just like any new technology.

Pros & Cons: Blu-ray Discs

Below is a brief overview of what we like and don't like about BDs.

Pros:

- Hold more data than HD DVDs
- Several manufacturers have demonstrated products that can read and write CDs, DVDs, and BDs
- Record HDTV programs without any quality loss
- Higher transfer rates than DVDs let you write more data in a shorter amount of time

Cons:

- New technology means a high initial cost
- BDs won't play in a regular DVD player
- Many aspects of Blu-ray technology are still in developmental stages

Companies That Support Blu-ray Technology

The list of companies creating or supporting the creation of Blu-ray electronics is fairly large. Here's a list of 20 of the most notable names currently creating BD players, recorders, or media. For a complete list, look on the Web site for the BDA (Blu-ray Disc Association) at www.blu-raydisc.com.

BenQ	Pioneer
Fujifilm	Samsung
Hitachi	Sharp
HP	Sony
JVC	TDK
Lions Gate Entertainment	Verbatim
LG Electronics	Walt Disney
Mitsubishi Electronics	Yamaha
Panasonic	Zenith
Philips	20th Century Fox



High-Definition DVDs

The HD DVD format started making major headlines in late 2003 when the DVD Forum, a group of representatives from major hardware, software, and media companies, voted that the HD DVD would receive the forum's endorsement to be the HDTV successor of the DVD.

As we mentioned earlier, the HD DVD uses the same type of blue-violet laser as the BDs, but HD DVDs hold slightly less data per layer than BDs. A single-layer disc has a 15GB capacity, while the dual-layer option holds 30GB. The reason HD DVDs don't hold as much data as a BD with the same number of layers is because HD DVDs have a longer track pitch than BDs. A **track pitch** is the thread to which data is written. Because the track pitch is shorter on BDs, more data can fit onto a layer of the disc.

Toshiba is leading the crusade in the fight for HD DVD media supremacy, and the company has also announced plans to release a triple-layer disc capable of holding 45GB or data. Much like Blu-ray technology, HD DVD technology is very new and therefore very pricey. Toshiba recently announced two new HD DVD players, the HD-A1 (\$499.99; www.toshiba.com) and the HD-XA1 (\$799.99).

Pros & Cons for HD DVDs

Here are some things to consider if you're considering an HD DVD player.

Pros:

- HD DVDs offer greater storage capacity than DVDs
- Technology is already being released
- HD DVDs have a slightly higher transfer rate than BDs
- HD DVDs are a bit less expensive to produce than BDs
- HD DVD players are backward compatible for CD and DVD playback

Cons:

- HD DVDs don't hold as much data per layer as BDs
- HD DVDs won't play in regular DVD players

Companies That Support HD DVD Technology

If you compare the two lists, you'll notice that some companies are indeed supporting both Blu-ray and HD DVD. Here's a list of a few companies supporting HD DVD technology.

Canon	Memory-Tech
Digital Theater Systems	Microsoft
Fuji	Mitsubishi Electronics
Fujitsu	New Line Cinema
HP	Paramount
Hitachi Maxell	NEC
Intel	Sanyo
JVC	Toshiba
Kenwood	Universal Pictures
Konica Minolta	Warner Home Video

Which Cell Phone Provider Is Right For You?

A Guide To Cell Phone Plans & Phones For Every Lifestyle

Kyocera Slider Sonic
\$199
www.virginmobileusa.com



Choosing a cell phone plan can be daunting; every provider's plan is configured a bit differently, making it hard to compare apples to apples. Choose the wrong plan, though, and you may as well throw your hard-earned money out the window due to wasted minutes that you'll never use or, even worse, surcharges when you exceed your monthly allotment of minutes.

The dilemma strikes home with Katie Boyd, a 34-year-old writer and mother of two in San Rafael, Calif. Until recently, Boyd and her husband, Andrew, had separate phone plans. "We are about to combine our plans onto one service because we hope that will save us some money," she says. "But I'm very frustrated with how limited the plan options are."

That's why we decided to look at the major carriers' plans and create a guide, so you can determine which service provider is right for you. Remember, the most important feature of a cell phone plan is that it works when you need it to. Boyd, for example, spent a year locked into a contract for a phone that didn't work 60% of the time.

Check providers' coverage maps and then ask friends and family members for real-life confirmation that the plan works where the provider says it does. Most plans include a brief window in

which you can cancel without penalty, so read the fine print and give the plan a good workout to be sure it's the one for you. We've included the MSRP for the phones, but you'll likely find better deals if you upgrade or sign up for a new plan.

In the meantime, happy shopping!

If You're Looking For: An inexpensive plan for occasional use.

You'll Need: A company that lets you prepay for minutes.

Our Recommendation: Virgin Mobile's Great Rates program (www.virginmobileusa.com). Its basic pricing plan offers a Minute2Minute option (25 cents per minute for the first 10 minutes of a day; 10 cents per minute after that) and a Day2Day option (10 cents per minute all the time, plus 35 cents per day).

Why We Recommend It: Unlike other plans that offer complicated pricing schemes, the minutes in Virgin's Great Rates plans are good for 90 days. (With some plans, the minutes' life span depends on how many you add at once, so the expiration dates vary, making them needlessly complex.) What's more, there are no roaming charges, and Virgin uses the Sprint PCS nationwide network.

Those features make this a perfect plan for Carrie Hawk. The South Euclid, Ohio, resident typically uses her phone for short, infrequent calls to keep her family posted on her whereabouts. "Since I don't use the phone very often, I didn't want to get socked with large monthly bills," she says.

Favorite Phone: Kyocera's Slider Sonic (\$199 from Virgin Mobile). This phone can accomplish virtually any multimedia

task other than getting you on "American Idol." It has a camera and a video recorder; it lets you browse the Web and play both MP3 and WMA (Windows Media Audio) audio formats; and, for an additional \$29.99, it has a Music Dock that's both a charger and a speaker system for the phone. And, yes, it takes phone calls, too.

Even in this age of global connection, it's not easy to find a plan that will work at home and abroad.

If You're Looking For: A plan that allows calls on trips outside the United States.

You'll Need: A plan and phone that accommodate global calling.

Our Recommendation: T-Mobile's international roaming plan (www.t-mobile.com). Rates vary by country, but calls placed in most European countries cost 99 cents per minute, and calls made from many Central and South American countries range from about \$1.49 to \$2.99 a minute.

Why We Recommend It: Even in this age of global connection, it's not easy to find a plan that will work at home and abroad. T-Mobile simplifies the process

more than any other carrier (although, we have to admit, it's still not a piece of cake), and its rates are better than those of any other plan we saw. One important caveat: Be sure the phone you select will work in the countries you're planning to visit. T-Mobile's Web site shows the frequencies used in each country; your phone must work on that frequency in order to place calls. Getting the right match between frequencies and phones may take a little back-and-forth, but that time will be well spent when you can call home from Paris without a problem.

Favorite Phone: BlackBerry 7105t (\$299.99). Sure, there are smaller and more chic phones, but if you're traveling this much, why not have full email capabilities and a QWERTY keyboard everywhere you go?

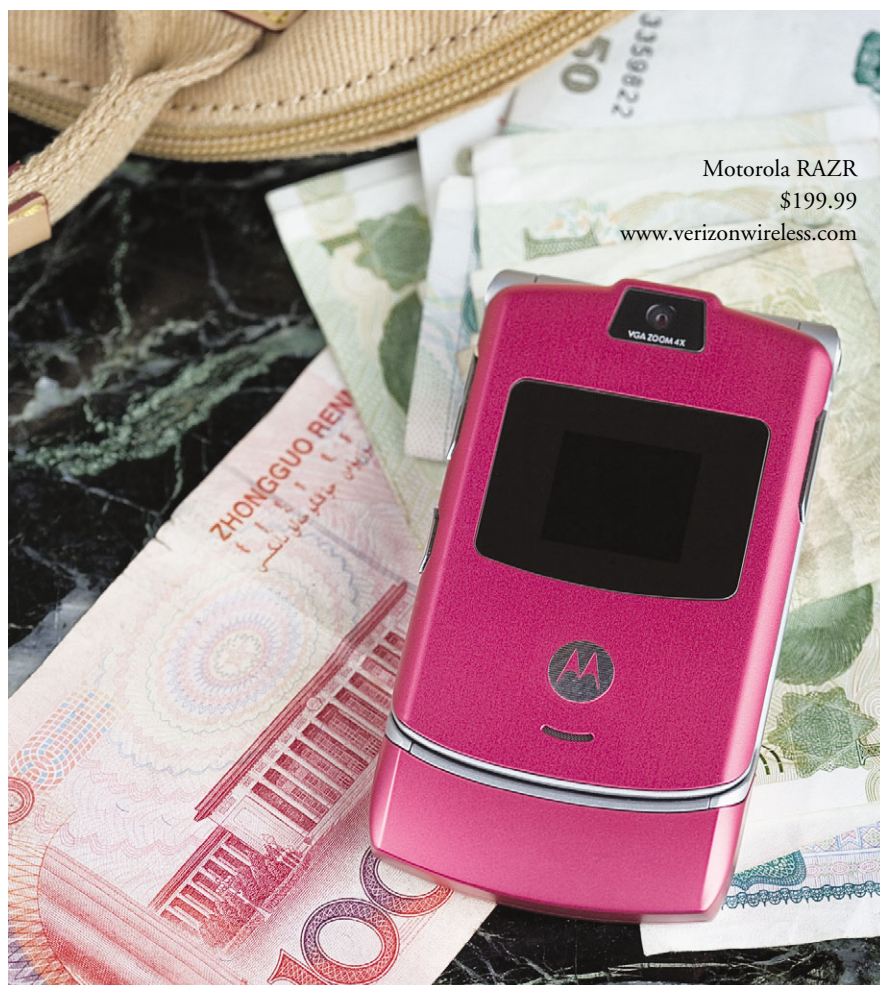
If You're Looking For: A family-friendly plan.

You'll Need: A plan that offers add-a-line options for your teens.

Our Recommendation: T-Mobile's Family Time Basic Plan. While most other companies charge \$69.99 for 700 minutes, T-Mobile charges \$59.99. And for that extra \$10 per month, T-Mobile has 1,000 minutes for \$69.99.

Why We Recommend It: Like the other major providers, T-Mobile offers two lines—with the option to add up to three others for \$9.99 a month each—with no long distance or roaming charges. Cell phone carriers are competing fiercely for this segment of the market, so if T-Mobile doesn't have coverage in your area, you can still find a decent deal from just about any other carrier. (If you're considering Sprint, though, take note: The company was





the only one we found that still charges roaming fees.)

Favorite Phone: Samsung x495 (\$129.99). Talk time of up to five hours per battery charge and speakerphone make this phone perfect for a busy mom, while games and instant messaging capabilities will appeal to the teens in the family.

If You're Looking For:
A plan for a jet-setting executive.

You'll Need: A plan with nationwide coverage and no roaming or long distance charges.

Our Recommendation: Verizon Wireless' (www.verizonwireless.com) America's

Choice plan includes several options in terms of monthly fees and minute allowances (from \$39.99 for 400 minutes to \$199.99 for 6,000 minutes), so you can tailor your plan to your use patterns.

Why We Recommend It: All long-distance and roaming charges are included—a significant benefit if you're in Tulsa one day and Tallahassee the next. Erin Hill, who frequently travels from her home in South Portland, Maine, down the eastern seaboard and beyond, attests to the importance of a plan with an extensive nationwide network. "I also want a provider with an easily accessible customer service center," she says. "I've had a cell phone for almost 10 years, and I've always been with Verizon."

Favorite Phone: Motorola RAZR V3 (\$199.99). The season's hottest phone, this sleek little beauty weighs just over 3 ounces, yet includes every modern necessity—Bluetooth connectivity, digital camera, speakerphone, Web browsing, and more—and provides up to five hours of talk time per battery charge.


If You're Looking For:
An excuse to cut your landline.

You'll Need: A plan with lots of minutes and a phone with impressive battery life.

Our Recommendation: T-Mobile's Get More 1000 Plus plan. For \$49.99, you get 1,000 anytime minutes plus unlimited night and weekend calls.

Why We Recommend It: Simple economics; T-Mobile's plan offers more minutes for less money than any other we found. Keep in mind, though, that once you run through your allotment for the month, additional minutes are 40 cents each. That can add up quickly, so calculate your anticipated usage carefully.

One other caveat: Many people now use their cell phones as their only phones, but there are drawbacks, including the inconvenience and expense when your cell suddenly gives up the ghost. For this reason, it's worth considering a warranty service, such as T-Mobile's Equipment Protection plan, which for \$3.99 to \$5.99 per line per month offers repair and/or replacement of your phone. Read the fine print carefully, though; deductibles range from \$40 to \$110 per claim.

Favorite Phone: Motorola v360 (\$199.99), which has up to five hours of talk time and 10 days of standby time. In addition, it has speakerphone, as well as Bluetooth capabilities and an MP3 player, making it possible to replace several devices with just this phone. 

BY MICHAELA CAVALLARO

Keeping News Hounds Happy

RSS Feeds & Podcasts Keep You Informed 24/7



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What Is RSS?

Based on the Web design language XML, **RSS** (Really Simple Syndication; also called Rich Site Summary) is a means of delivering Web-based content to your computer based partly on the schedule you create. That content can include headlines, summaries, links, blog postings, photos, and even **podcasts**, which are digital audio files that you can download and play on your computer's media player or an MP3 player.

You can easily find RSS, XML, and POD buttons on the Web sites of newspapers, TV and radio networks, and publications, among others. If you click those links, however, you'll see nothing but a bunch of XML code.

To properly view RSS feeds, you first need to download and install a news reader (also called a news aggregator), such as SharpReader (www.sharpreader.net) or Awasu (www.awasu.com). Or you can subscribe for free to a Web site that collects and displays those feeds, such as NewsGator (www.newsgator.com) and Bloglines (www.bloglines.com).

Feed The Reader

Once you install a news reader, click the RSS or XML link on the site you want to receive feeds from and copy and paste the URL of the page that opens into your news reader. (You may need to open New Channel, or a similarly named command, under the File menu of your news reader and then

It's no secret that newspaper circulation is decreasing in America. Instead of the venerable newspaper, many news hounds are turning to Web sites to get their fix of news, information, and entertainment.

JupiterResearch (www.jupitermedia.com) reports that 30% of all consumers are going to Web sites of cable TV news stations (such as CNN and MSNBC) to get national and international news, eclipsing the 29% of consumers who use the newspaper as their source for such information.

Once users have made the leap to Web-based news sources, it's a small step to get their news in an even more mobile format: from RSS feeds and podcasts available online.

You aren't alone if you have only a vague idea of what these technologies are. But now is the time to get informed. Not only are RSS feeds and podcasts growing in popularity—the New Oxford American Dictionary tagged "podcast" as its 2005 Word of the Year—but once you know how to use them, you'll never have to leave home without the news and entertainment you want to access when you want, where you want.



1GB Sansa

\$119.99 • www.sandisk.com

paste the URL.) The reader will then walk you through steps by which you can customize how often the feed is updated and how your PC or notebook alerts you to the updates.

To see what we mean, look at the RSS page of CNN's Web site (www.cnn.com/services/rss). This site, like other news portals, gives you a choice of news categories you can receive. Click the URL and paste it into the appropriate location in your news reader.

Once you've subscribed to RSS feeds, you'll enjoy the convenience of going to one place on your Desktop to see all the headlines and other information you've requested. Establish your Internet connection, open the news reader, and click the link of the news source whose headlines or summaries you want to read.

Whether you have just a few minutes at home on your PC or you're out and about with your notebook and a wireless connection, you can scan headlines from each news source you choose without the need to jump from Web site to Web site.

Finding Podcasts

Like MP3 music files, you can easily download podcasts to your Desktop and play them there or transfer them to a media player for mobile listening. Some news readers are designed to manage downloaded podcasts, but you also can get free podcasting software dedicated to that purpose.

One good place to find podcasts is Apple iTunes 6 (www.itunes.com). You can download and use this service without cost, and all of the podcasts available here are free, too. Click the Podcast link in iTunes to open the well-stocked podcast directory. Depending on what format the podcast is recorded in, you'll be able to transfer the file to a non-iPod MP3 player.

If you prefer to use something other than iTunes to download and manage podcasts, try Juice (www.juicereceiver.com) or jPodder (www.jpodder.com).

Podcast managers work similarly to news readers. Just copy and paste the URL into the manager or click the Subscribe button on the podcast. Then, set your preferences for how often you want to receive the podcast.

One way to find and subscribe to podcasts is to visit the Web sites of whose audio files you want to hear. These may include Web sites of newspapers, radio stations, TV networks, talk radio hosts, and sports teams. Don't limit yourself to these sources, though. Because anyone can record and post podcasts with the right equipment, it's worthwhile to look

Our Favorite RSS Feeds & Podcasts

It's impossible to find and review every podcast and RSS feed available, but you won't be disappointed by starting with the following:

News RSS feeds. We like scanning headlines from CNN.com and Fox.com, both of which allow customers to choose the categories of headlines they want to see.

Sports RSS feeds. What better source than the "Worldwide Leader in Sports," ESPN (www.espn.com), to keep up with scores and trades?

Movie reviews. You can find podcasts of "Ebert & Roeper" movie

reviews and newly released DVD picks at iTunes (www.itunes.com) and www.movies.go.com.

Infotainment. National Public Radio (www.npr.org) is loaded with informative and entertaining podcasts, including "All Songs Considered" and "Story of the Day." But for a light-hearted, humorous approach to the week's news, listen to the "Wait Wait . . . Don't Tell Me!" podcast, presented in quiz-show format. That and other NPR podcasts are available at iTunes and NPR. ●

for more niche podcasts, such as one on how to select the right wine for the right occasion. Check out "Wine For Newbies" on iTunes, as well as "Grape Radio" (www.graperadio.com) and "Winecast" (www.winecast.com), which we found at Podcast Alley. Good starting points for finding more podcasts like this include Podcast.net (www.podcastnet.com), the Podcast Network (www.thepodcastnetwork.com), the Podcast Bunker (www.podcastbunker.com), and Yahoo! Podcasts (podcasts.yahoo.com).

When you subscribe to a podcast, note how long it plays and, more important, how many megabytes it consumes. Weekly podcasts can last an hour or more and exceed 20MB. You'll need to gauge how many podcasts you can load onto your MP3 player or multimedia device, given its storage capacity and other files you've already transferred. (See the "Best CE Devices For RSS Feeds & Podcasts" sidebar.)

Freedom Of Mobility

One of the reasons satellite radio is growing in popularity is that consumers can listen to the type of programming they want regardless of their location. No more tuning in to static-filled stations or driving out of broadcast range.

Podcasts give you freedom of mobility, as well, but without the monthly subscription costs of satellite radio.

Perhaps the ultimate freedom will come with the help of companies such as Melodeo (www.melodeo.com), publisher of Mobilcast. This software allows cell phone users to download podcasts




Vaio SZ
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straight to their phones. In February Melodeo teamed with Rogers Wireless (www.rogers.com/podcasts), a Canadian cell phone service provider, to roll out the first mobile podcast service in North America. It's only available in Canada, but this shows that the technology is right around the corner.

This technology is still in its infancy, and it isn't free: Rogers customers must pay \$5 a month for the service and any applicable data fees and roaming charges. It will also only work with select cell phones. But you can go to the Mobilcast Web site (www.mobilcast.com) and download the latest beta version if you have the right gear and want to pay a little extra each month.

Make The Leap

It's only a matter of time, we hope, before accessing podcasts with your cell phone will be cheap and quick. But in the meantime you have a seemingly endless list of news and entertainment feeds you can read or listen to for free at your convenience with a PC, notebook, or MP3 player. For now, this should keep even the most ardent news hounds happy. 

Best CE Devices For RSS Feeds & Podcasts

For mobile viewing of RSS feeds, you'll want a lightweight notebook with wireless connectivity. The new, customizable Sony Vaio SZ (\$1,449.99 and up; www.sonymstyle.com) fits the bill. It has a 13.3-inch screen and a 40GB hard drive, weighs under 4 pounds, and is less than an inch thick.

The most important thing to consider when selecting an MP3 player on which to listen to podcasts is memory. Some podcasts are hefty files; if you want to download a few to your player, along with favorite songs, you should have at least 1GB of storage.

The following affordable devices have ample storage for podcasts.

2GB iPod nano (\$199; www.apple.com/ipod). The nano can play

about 14 hours between battery charges. If you can splurge on a video iPod (\$299 and up), you also can enjoy the growing number of pay-per-view shows available from iTunes, including recently added programs from Showtime.

1GB iriver T10 (\$199; www.iriver.com). This small and sporty MP3 player has an FM tuner and recorder, plus it yields about 45 hours of use on one AA battery.

1GB SanDisk Sansa (\$119.99; www.sandisk.com). Listen to podcasts and music files for up to 15 hours of playback time on one AAA battery or use the FM tuner with up to 20 preset stations. ●

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

tips

Tweak Your
TV's Settings

1

Best Picture Show

If you've invested a lot of money in a new TV, you definitely want it looking and sounding its very best. For a few dollars more, you can buy a DVD tool that will help you set up your television to do just that. Products such as Joe Kane Productions Digital Video Essentials (\$24.99; www.videoessentials.com) come equipped with numerous diagnostic tools that run a barrage of tests on your home theater to determine the best audio and video settings for your system.

2

A Bright Outlook

Brightness, also called black level, controls the amount of white within an image. Most manufacturers have the default brightness set at a level designed for a display at an electronics store where it will compete with loads of ambient light and other TVs. This level is way too high for most home settings. Generally, you'll find the correct setting for your environment somewhere between 40 to 60% of your TV's maximum level. If you have a favorite alley scene in a movie, watch it while adjusting the level so that the black in the picture is a true black, but you can still see detail on images in the dark.

3

Contrasting Styles

Sometimes labeled as Picture, and more accurately known as white level, the contrast setting controls the overall light level of your TV. Similar to brightness, the factory default on most TVs is set too high. Generally, start with your Contrast setting at 50% of its maximum strength and tweak it a few points either way to best fit your environment. You'll know you have set your contrast properly when the edges of bright white objects are sharp and distinct, not blurred. Be careful if you have a plasma screen or a tube rear-projection TV. A contrast set too high on one of these sets may increase the chance of **screen burn-in**, a condition where an image is permanently burned into the phosphor coating of your display tube.

4

Get Unplugged

It's always a good idea to write down the display settings of your TV before you change them. That way you have a point you can go back to if your new adjustments aren't making your picture as crisp as you hoped. If you don't have the opportunity to jot down your settings before you start working with your adjustments, you can always unplug your television if it gets too bad. This should reset the A/V adjustments to the manufacturer's defaults. You'll lose your work, but sometimes the fresh start this offers is welcome.

5

Presets

If you have an HDTV, it probably has a list of preset picture settings you can choose from to adjust your picture. Your list might include choices such as Dynamic/Vivid, Standard, or Movie/Pro, and each setting may work particularly well for a different type of video. The Dynamic/Vivid option significantly increases contrast, brightness, and sharpness. It works well for animations and video games, particularly in a room with strong lighting. The Standard setting will give adequate results for viewing your normal cable or satellite TV shows. The Movie/Pro setting adjusts the contrast and brightness to levels that are supposed to give the most realistic effect. You may be able to select one of these presets and make small changes to it in order to get everything just right.



BY SAM EVANS



'Tis The Season

Think CE For
Moms, Dads & Grads

Just when you think you've recovered from the frenzy of holiday shopping, a whole new season of gift giving descends upon us. Spring brings showers, flowers, and a flurry of special occasions to honor moms, dads, and grads.

A gift of electronics is always in season and in good taste. We have a few ideas to help get you started shopping for Mother's Day and Father's Day, as well as for high school and college graduates.

For Moms

You can't go wrong giving a mom anything related to digital photography. And once she has a digital camera, you'll never run out of related products to get her for future gifts. (See the "Gifts On A Budget" sidebar.)

If the mom on your list doesn't have a digital camera yet, you can get her started with an affordable and easy-to-use model. The 6MP (megapixel) EasyShare C643 (\$229.95; www.kodak.com)

and 5MP EasyShare C533 from Kodak (\$179.95), for instance, pack a nice set of features at a reasonable price. Later on, you can get her the related Printer Dock Series 3 (\$149.95) so she can print her pics at home.

Other manufacturers sell camera/printer bundles, too. The HP Photosmart 428 GoGo Photo Studio (\$329.99; www.shopping.hp.com) includes the 5.2MP M517 camera, the 420 portable printer, USB cable, TV remote control, and photo software. Your mom can also connect the printer to the TV with the included AV cable and use the remote to show off her photos to a crowd.

Your mom might also appreciate a unique way to display her photos on an end table in her living room. The Digital Photo Display from Philips (\$249.99; www.store.philips.com) looks like a photo frame but acts like a slideshow. She can insert a memory



card (SD, MultiMedia, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, or CompactFlash Type I) into the frame and display either one photo, thumbnails of many photos, or a slideshow.

Moms on the go need to stay connected. For a stylish way to keep in touch with friends and family, give her the new, limited-edition pink Motorola RAZR, with service from Verizon (\$199.99; www.vzwshop.com/razr), T-Mobile (\$249.99; www.t-mobile.com), or Cingular (\$199.99; www.cingular.com). This slim model weighs less than 4 ounces but isn't light on the features. It has a 4X zoom camera, picture caller ID, integrated Bluetooth technology, and video playback. And if pink isn't her color, you can get her the RAZR in silver or black.

For Dads

We usually think of wide- and flat-screen TVs as a guy thing. It's easy to

picture Dad in his easy chair, remote in one hand, beverage in another, enjoying the big game on a big screen TV. Yet more and more, women are involved in, if not outright making, the buying decisions for big-ticket CE items. So Father's Day is an ideal gift-giving opportunity: Mom (and perhaps the kids) can select a model that's beautiful, functional, and affordable, and Dad can get the TV of his dreams.

Start by perusing the new SH20U line of high-definition, wide-screen LCDs (liquid-crystal displays) from Sharp (www.sharppusa.com). The line has four sizes, ranging from the 20-inch (\$799.99) to the 37-inch (\$2,699.99) models. If you're feeling really generous, give Dad the 65-inch HD LCD from Sharp (\$20,999.99).

Sony (www.sonymstyle.com) features 26- (\$1,499.99), 32- (\$1,999.99), and 40-inch (\$2,999.99) HD LCD TVs in its Bravia S-Series.

If your dad likes to be on the cutting edge of technology, consider one of the high-definition DVD players due on retail shelves this spring. Toshiba released two HD-DVD models, the HD-XA1 and the HD-A1 (\$499.99 and up; www.toshiba.com), while Pioneer and Samsung have both announced Blu-ray Disc DVD players: the BDP-HD1 (\$1,800; www.pioneer.com) and the BD-P1000 (\$1,000; www.samsung.com), respectively.

If he'd prefer a DVD recorder, check out the line from Panasonic (\$199.95 and up; www.panasonic.com). The high-end model, the DMR-EH50S (\$399.95), records to a variety of DVD types or to its 100GB hard drive. Sony's DVD recorder, the RDR-HX715, has HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface) and a 160GB hard drive (\$699.95; www.sony.com). With either model, your dad can use the TV Guide OnScreen Program Guide, compatible with a cable

If your dad likes to be on the cutting edge of technology, consider one of the high-definition DVD players due on retail shelves this spring.

(not satellite) hookup, to find and record TV shows. Or you can go the TiVo route. Humax sells the DRT400 (\$399.99; www.humaxusa.com), a 40-hour TiVo recorder, DVD player, and DVD burner. The dad on your list can double his recording time with the 80-hour DRT800 (\$499.99). TiVo service is \$12.95 a month or a one-time fee of \$299.

Dads who serve as the family's filmmaker may like an upgrade to a DVD camcorder. Canon's new 4.3MP DC40 (\$899; www.usa.canon.com), with 10X optical zoom lens, records directly to 3-inch DVD-R/-RWs. It also features a wide-screen high-resolution recording setting, ideal for families with a TV format to match.

If your dad's an outdoor enthusiast, consider the 30MB Magellan eXplorist XL (\$449.99; www.magellangps.com), which boasts the biggest screen of any handheld GPS device on the market. Less expensive options in this line include the 22MB eXplorist 210 (\$179.99).

For Grads

It's a safe bet that media players and related products are a big hit with grads of all ages. High-end players, such as the Creative Zen Vision:M

(\$329.99; www.creative.com), give them lots of multimedia entertainment for the cost. This 30GB model holds up to 15,000 songs and thousands of photos, plays several video formats, and comes in five hip colors. It works with several online music services and supports TiVoToGo.


If your grad already has an iPod, then put a little class in her dorm room or first apartment with the Klipsch iGroove Shelf System (\$279.99; www.klipsch.com), which works with all dockable iPods and will work with the nano and shuffle if you use the included dock adapter.

Almost every grad, especially those leaving high school and going away to college, could use a notebook. Affordable options are the Gateway NX500 series (\$799.99 and up; www.gateway.com) and the Toshiba Satellite line (\$699 and up; www.toshibadirect.com). With WinXP Media Center Edition preloaded and a DVD burner, the Toshiba Qosmio line (\$1,699 and up) is ideal for dorm living and post-college life.

Not many graduates will turn down a new cell phone, especially one with all the functions of the Palm Treo 700w (\$499.99 with service from Verizon). It

runs Windows Mobile and has a full keyboard, MP3 player, 1.3MP camera, and video playback.

Look For Special Deals

Don't be surprised if you find some of these devices at prices that are well below their MSRPs. Just as they do for the winter holidays, manufacturers may be ready to offer special offers, sale prices, and rebates during the spring shopping season. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCHE

Gifts On A Budget

You don't have to break your budget to buy someone special a gift she'll find irresistible. If the recipient has a CE product she loves—a digital camera or notebook, for example—or will be receiving one, then you can enhance that gift with a related but affordable accessory.

For instance, carrying cases are must-haves for digital cameras and notebooks. Nylon or vinyl digital camera cases, such as the Kodak Small Camera Bag (\$9.95; www.kodak.com), can hold a camera with wrist strap, memory cards, and batteries. A nylon notebook case from Toshiba Direct is only \$59.99. The women on your gift list will appreciate the stylish and practical Tina Metro Brief (\$95; www.sumdex.com). Available in black, gray, tan, red, and sage blue, the brief comes with a detachable shoulder strap.

Mobile phone users might also appreciate a wireless headset; Palm sells the Treo 700w/650 Wireless Headset for \$79.99.



Photographers can always use more memory, and, if they print at home, they'll appreciate ink and photo paper. A 128MB Kodak SD (Secure Digital) card (\$27.99) holds about 64 high-resolution pictures, and a 512MB card (\$63.99) stores approximately 256 photos. The HP 200-sheet photo value pack with Vivera inks is just \$47.99 and would be a great gift for anyone with an HP Photosmart 400 series printer. Value packs for other HP photo printers are available at the HP Web site.

Accessories for MP3 players are also abundant and often affordable. Creative sells colorful Stik-ons for its Zen Neon,

for instance, and they're only \$9.99 each (www.creative.com), and armbands and tubes for the iPod nano cost \$29 (www.apple.com/ipod). The pliable Griffin TuneFlex (\$39.99; www.griffin-technology.com) is an iPod nano dock and charger designed for use in vehicles.

Finally, don't be afraid to give a gift card, whether it's for a retail consumer electronics store, such as Best Buy or Fry's Electronics, or to an online service, such as Napster (www.napster.com) or iTunes (store.apple.com). You can buy prepaid Napster cards at stores such as Best Buy and Target and prepaid iTunes cards and gift certificates start at \$10. ●



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Home A/V Editor, Crutchfield

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Sony Bravia XBR LCD TVs #158KD26XBR, 158KD32XBR, 158KD40XBR



iPOD'S PERFECT PAL

Bose® SoundDock™

"These days, I find I don't have to spend much time telling people about the Apple iPod – most of them already know. But I've noticed more and more iPod fans who are looking for ways to listen to their iPod without headphones. One of the solutions I've been suggesting is the attractive-yet-understated Bose SoundDock. It's essentially a dock with built-in powered speakers. All you do is slide your iPod into place and let the music play."

Bose SoundDock #018SNDDOCK



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Canon PowerShot SD450 #280PSSD450

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Break With Tradition

Update Your Mother's Day Gift Ideas

Roses are red, chocolate is divine, but why not surprise Mom with something that's more fun, practical, and long-lasting instead? Of course, there's nothing wrong with flowers and chocolate, but even analog moms probably have a secret wish list that includes at least one digital or electronic gadget.

We've taken the liberty of describing some of the moms we know, but if your mom's interests lie elsewhere, feel free to mix and match our suggestions to put together a fabulous Mother's Day surprise.

The Culinary Mom

Oh, those chocolate chip cookies straight from the oven, chicken soup made with love when you weren't feeling well, and the lasagna that's to die for. If that's what

comes to mind when you think of home, then you may be the child of a Culinary Mom. Or, perhaps your mom loves to dine out at four- and five-star restaurants and is more likely to watch the Food Network than Oprah. If so, then you, too, may be the progeny of Culinary Mom.

If your mom has a computer, why not give her food-related software such as the Cook's Palate (\$49.99; www.cookspalate.com), so she can create her own cookbook? Using templates and automatically generated features (even nutritional information and a shopping list), all she has to do is enter her secret recipes and print them and voila! Your mom has her very own cookbook. This software is relatively easy to use, although she'll need a Windows-based computer and a little technical savvy. If you're lucky, when she puts together a collection of her most delicious dishes, she'll give you a copy. This is one occasion when you won't mind being re-gifted.

Culinary moms who would rather eat out than cook will love an electronic subscription to Zagat On The Go (\$24.95 for a one-year subscription; www.zagat.com; check mobile.zagat.com to see if your mom's cell phone or PDA is compatible). With automatic updates, your mom will always have the latest and greatest restaurant information at her fingertips.

And if Mom favors foreign films (and doesn't mind an R rating), pick up a copy of "Like Water For Chocolate" (\$6.99; www.amazon.com) on DVD—it's sensual, it's romantic, and she'll be inspired to channel even more love into her culinary masterpieces. Plan a girls' night in and share the experience with Mom. Remember to substitute Pot au Chocolat or another exotic chocolate dessert for popcorn.

The Creative Mom

Help Mom spread her creative wings with a new digital camera and some

imaging software. If your mom likes point-and-shoot simplicity with style, check out the Kodak EasyShare V570 (\$399.95; www.kodak.com)—this sleek black camera features two lenses: one with a 3X optical zoom and another for wide angle. The camera's classy looks go with everything from jeans and a T-shirt to that perfect little black dress, so she can tote this little camera everywhere

If your mom now spends most of her time at the office, in meetings, or running to catch a plane, we have a few ideas to help her stay stylish on the road.

and feel great. It comes bundled with Kodak's simple-to-use EasyShare software so your mother can play with the pictures and not feel overwhelmed by technology. Also check out the very cool and tiny Canon SD30 (\$499.99; www.canon.com), a 5MP camera that comes in four glam colors. And if your mom is the family's memory keeper, look at some of the latest scrapbooking software such as MemoryMixer (\$79; www.memorymixer.com).

For the more photo-savvy mom, consider the new Canon EOS 30D (\$1,399 body only; \$1,499 with 18-55mm lens; www.canon.com). This D-SLR is equipped with advanced features for creative control and delivers excellent image quality. Pair the camera with a Kingston 1GB CompactFlash 100x Ultimate Card (\$129; www.kingston.com) and Adobe Photoshop Elements 4 (\$99.99; www.adobe.com), and Mom

will be on the fast track toward becoming the Annie Leibovitz of the neighborhood.

The Business Mom

Moms often have two careers—one at home and one at the office. If your mom now spends most of her time at the office, in meetings, or running to catch a plane, we have a few ideas to help her stay stylish on the road.

Traveling with a laptop is probably as second nature for your mom as carrying her keys or lipstick. Fortunately,

laptop bags are now as stylish as some of the latest designer bags, so maybe it's time to treat Mom to a new tote such as the Targus 15-inch Elegant Leather Tote (\$149.99; www.targus.com). Available in classic black or, if Mom dares to be different, red, this tote will hold a laptop (up to a 15-inch screen) in a padded compartment, with plenty of room for everything else she needs to take on her trip.

Chances are that Mom also travels with a PDA or BlackBerry. Coach has a simple but classic leather case in black or tan that provides protection for the device

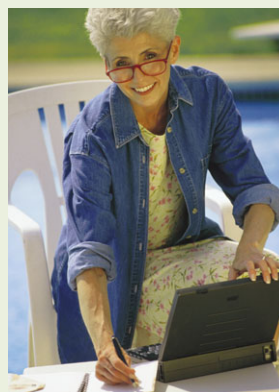
Let's Not Forget About Grandma!

Just because she's a grandmother doesn't mean she doesn't need (or can't handle) the latest technology. If you're on a budget, and if your grandma isn't already savvy with her PC, a great gift for Granny would be computer lessons—from you! Spend some time with Grandma at her local library. Set up an email account for her (if she doesn't already have one) and show her how to surf the Internet. At the very least, you'll have fun spending time together. And she may take to the computer like a fish to water thanks to your expert instructions.

Of course, grandmas love their grandchildren, and what better way to let Grandma feel close to them than by giving her a digital camera, so she can snap her own photos of them. Keep in mind that although ultra-compact cameras are cute, they may be too small for her to use comfortably. Equally important is the size of

the LCD and menu screens. We like the Kodak EasyShare C663 (\$299.95; www.kodak.com) for its bright 2.5-inch LCD and its large, clear typeface and icons. Give your grandma a gift certificate to a photo kiosk at a local store such as Ritz Camera or Costco or an online photo site such as Shutterfly (www.shutterfly.com) or Winkflash (www.winkflash.com), and she'll be good to go.

Or you can give Grandma a digital picture frame, so she can download her photos (or you can download them for her) and watch a slideshow anytime she wants. The 7-inch eMotion Digital Picture Frame & DVD Player (\$349; www.media.street.com) can handle pretty much every file format and media card on the market, including video files, and it doubles as a DVD player, too. It comes with a rechargeable battery and a remote, so Grandma can display the frame anywhere in her house. ●



Gifts For Moms, Dads & Grads

as well as a touch of style (\$98; www.coach.com).

When your mom's on the road, she may have a tough time keeping track of documents, presentations, images, and all the other data that comes with doing business. One great solution to keep everything in one place is a USB flash drive. These little devices are

available in various capacities and styles. But the ultimate road-warrior device is a U3 Smart-capable flash drive that incorporates the U3 platform, so the device can be loaded with U3-compatible software applications (various prices; www.software.u3.com), and your mom can work from any PC with ease. These U3 Smart-capable drives are available from a number of

USB flash drive manufacturers such as Kingston, Memorex, and SanDisk (from around \$35; www.u3.com). Take a look at the SanDisk Cruzer Titanium (\$79.99 1GB, \$119.99 2GB; www.sandisk.com) and the Memorex Mini TravelDrive (from \$34.99 256MB to \$179.99 2GB; www.memorex.com).

The Outdoor Mom

Let's say your mom loves to hike, bike, and otherwise spend her time in the great outdoors. Sounds pretty earthy, eh? But there are any number of electronic devices that will help Mom enjoy her outdoor activities (and help keep her safe, too).

One great solution to keep everything in one place is a USB flash drive.

Getting there—and back—is key to any adventure, so she will appreciate a GPS device, such as the new Magellan eXplorist 210 (\$199.99; www.magellangps.com). In addition to the handheld receiver, Mom will make good use of the bundled map software and cigarette lighter adapter. It also comes with a USB cable and clip case, so it's a pretty good deal and a small price to pay to make sure Mom gets where she wants to go and back home safely.

Another good idea for your outdoors-loving mom is a watch. Yes, a watch, but not just any old watch. Check out




Memorex Mini Travel Drive (1GB)
\$99.99
www.memorex.com

Casio's Pathfinder Watch PAG40B-2V (\$200; www.casio.com). Not only does this rugged waterproof timepiece tell time, but it also functions as an altimeter, barometer, thermometer, and digital compass, and it can handle temperatures as low as a chilly 14 degrees

Fahrenheit. That's way too cold for us, but if your mom's as rugged as this watch, she can probably make good use of all its features.

With new and exciting products hitting the shelves almost daily, choices might

seem a bit overwhelming but don't fall back on tradition and head for the florist. Break out of the mold and you're sure to find something that's as special as your mom. 

BY THEANO NIKITAS

Gift-Giving Tips

1. Most moms will be happy with whatever you get them, but when you're shopping, think about her interests—especially those that she hasn't had time to pursue. Mom will appreciate your thoughtfulness, and you'll feel good about giving her the opportunity to follow her dreams.

2. If Mom's still living in a mostly analog world, choose a CE device that's really easy to use, so she won't be intimidated. Be prepared to spend time helping her transition to the new gear; in fact, create some cute gift certificates on your computer for unlimited tech help (from you).

3. Before you whip out the credit card, check with Dad or other family members to make sure that Mom doesn't already have a digital camera or the latest electronic gadget. And because CE gear can be a little pricey, have your siblings chip in and make it a group gift.

It's A Wrap

Because you've put so much thought and effort into choosing the perfect gift, why not add a personal touch to your gift wrap? Gather some photos of you or Mom (better yet, you and Mom); if they're prints or negatives, scan them into your computer. Use an image-editing program such as Adobe Photoshop Elements 4 (\$99; www.adobe.com) or Microsoft Digital Image Suite 2006 (\$99.95; www.microsoft.com) and create a digital montage of images. Add some text wishing Mom a happy Mother's Day if you'd like. If you have any of your childhood drawings or old hand-made Mother's Day cards, scan them in, as well, and add them to your artwork. Print the collage on Epson Matte Paper Heavyweight (\$12.99 for 50 8.5- x 11-inch sheets; www.epson.com), for instance, and use it to wrap the gift. Print two or more sheets and

piece them together if you need to cover a larger area.

Instead, you might consider a pack of Pictorico Premium PolySilk Fabric (\$16.95 for 10 8.5- x 11-inch sheets; www.pictorico.com); this silk-like fabric comes with a peel-off backing and is designed to be used with inkjet printers. Print your photo montage, peel off the paper backing, and get out your sewing machine (or needle and thread). Sew up the two long sides, create a hem at the top, thread a ribbon through it, and you've created a beautiful silk gift bag for Mom that she will treasure forever.

If you're thinking of putting her gift in a box (a plain white or solid color works best), make some pint-sized prints, such as 2 x 3 inches, and pick up some photo corners

from your local craft store. Attach the photo corners to the box and insert the photos. Mom can display the box on her dresser or use it to store other photos or trinkets. In fact, she'll probably love the gift wrap as much as she loves the gift inside! ●





Plantronics' Pulsar 590A
Bluetooth Stereo Headset
\$249.95 • www.plantronics.com

Get Your Dad Wired This Father's Day

Gift Ideas For The Hardest Man
In The World To Shop For

You've heard the jokes. You've seen the cartoons: Father's Day gifts so routine that they belong in their very own Hall of Fame. This June 18, give the ties, cologne, and barbecue aprons a pass, and go for something that your dad will find a little more electrifying... and, if he's a fan of "24," maybe even let him channel his inner Jack Bauer. As you shop, keep a few things in mind:

Will he use it? Fathers tend to be a utilitarian breed. Make sure your gift choice feeds into an existing habit or interest, rather than forcing him to acquire a new one.

Can he use it? Some people just aren't heavily tech-oriented. There's not much point in getting a complicated, deep-menu gadget for someone who had his hands full learning how to program a VCR.

If it's an accessory, is it compatible with what he already has? This is particularly important when it comes to connections, whether physical or wireless.

What's Hot In 2006?

Analysts with the CEA (Consumer Electronics Association) expect this Father's Day's most wanted list (and, by extension, most appreciated list) to parallel the industry's overall hot product categories. Here's the breakdown, in five major categories:

1 MP3 players with video playback capability. This year, 30% of all players sold will be able to play video, as well as audio. The obvious choice is the iPod (\$299 and up; www.ipod.com), in its fifth year of market domination. Now that all full-sized iPods have video capability, in addition to playing music and displaying photos, you can give your dad a multimedia center that will fit in his hand.

2 Video game consoles. 2006 is could be a pretty hot year if your dad's a gamer. Late 2005 saw the release of the much anticipated Microsoft Xbox 360 (\$399, \$299; www.xbox.com). For \$399, your dad will get a console with a hard drive, a wireless controller, an Xbox Live headset, component HD AV cable, and an Ethernet cable. For \$299, he'll get a console without a hard drive, a wired controller, and a composite AV cable. The extra \$100 is well worth it.

3 Flat-panel televisions. As prices continue to fall, TVs suitable for hanging are coming within the budgets of more and more people. LCD sets easily win the popularity contest; sales should hit 7 million sets this year. Plasma sales will lag well behind at 2.9 million.

For those with really deep pockets, a flat-panel TV will provide your dad with the ultimate wow factor. Makes and models abound, but we—and lots of satisfied customers—are mightily impressed by Hitachi's HDL52 series of LCD high-definition televisions. With its glossy black frame and the bottom-mounted speakers, the 37-inch 37-HDL52 (\$2,699.99; www.hitachi.us) looks as gorgeous as its picture.

On the low-end of the size scale, maybe your dad would rather take his flicks with him. Toshiba's SD-P1600 Portable DVD Player (\$199.99; www.toshiba.com) has a 7-inch screen and some of the highest customer satisfaction ratings for portables. It plays several formats of

Top Five Gifts For Dad

So you're a shopper who just wants to cut to the chase? This list is for you.

Apple iPod

\$299 for 30MB model, \$399 for 60MB; www.ipod.com

Canon PowerShot G6

\$699; www.canonusa.com

Delphi XM SKYFi2 Satellite Radio Receiver

\$149.99; www.xmradio.com

Hitachi 37HDL52 LCD HDTV

\$2,699.99; www.hitachi.us

Plantronics Pulsar 590A Bluetooth Stereo Headset

\$249.95; www.plantronics.com

video, photo, and audio discs and includes a car cord adapter for automotive use.

4 Digital cameras and camcorders. Whether they're for preserving family moments or for artistic inspiration, digital imagery gadgets have pretty much become must-have items for everyday life.

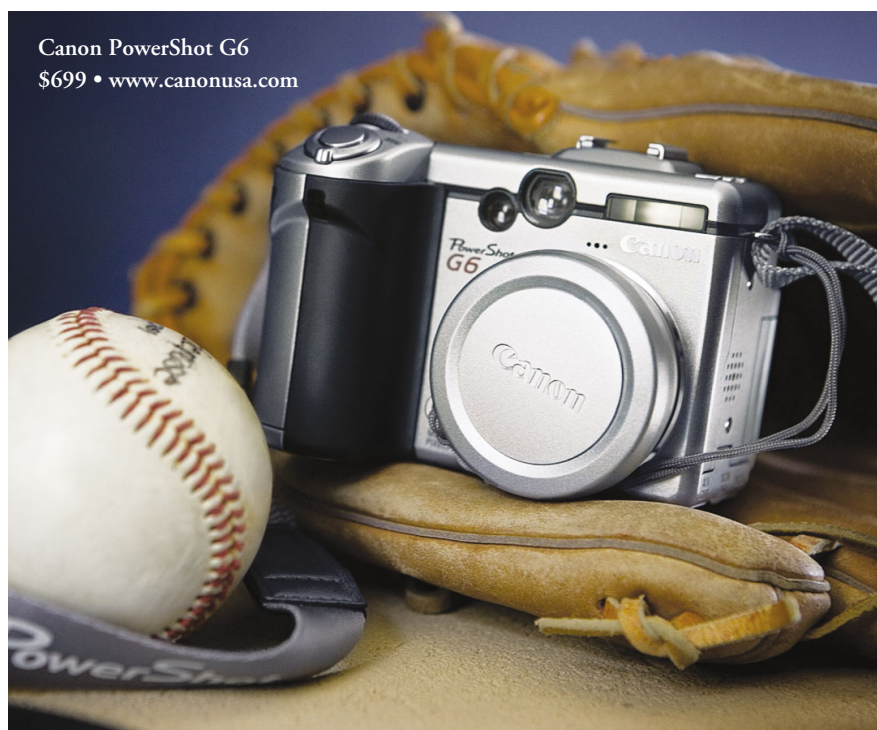
If your dad could use an excellent all-around camera for family snapshots that will also indulge artistic experiments, check out the 7.1MP PowerShot G6 (\$699; www.canonusa.com). It has 12 shooting modes for both SLR-like creative control and point-and-shoot simplicity. It's also one of the quickest, most responsive point-and-shoot models currently available, in case your dad likes being quick on the draw.

If he already has a camera, he may enjoy cranking out his own prints. Epson's Stylus Photo RX700 (\$399.99, www.epson.com) is an all-in-one printer/scanner that has lots of photo-specific features. It will print on paper up to 11 inches wide, as well as CDs.

And if neither of those models is quite right, Canon and Epson have plenty of others that might be just the ticket.

5 In-vehicle electronics. In this category, think GPS devices for mobile navigation, satellite radio receivers, and accessories for other consumer electronics, such as transmitters for MP3 player reception in the car.

Your dad will always know where he's going (and how to get back home) when he's packing a GPS unit. Garmin offers a wide line of models for pocket and dashboard. Among the company's newest innovations is the Forerunner 205 (\$267.84; www.garmin.com), a wrist unit that also measures speed, distance, calories burned, and more



during athletic workouts such as runs and bike rides.

As for satellite radio, the choice comes down to SIRIUS (www.sirius.com) and XM (www.xmradio.com). Each provides over 100 channels of commercial-free music and talk for a monthly subscription cost of \$12.95. Each carries a choice of several receivers that your father can

listen to in the car or, if he prefers, at home or even from his pocket. Their basic mobile units are the SIRIUS One Radio With Car Kit (\$49.99) and, at XM, the Audiovox Xpress (\$79.99).

You can also opt for third-party receivers, such as JVC's KT-SR2000 SIRIUS Plug N' Play tuner (\$99; www.jvc.com). This can shift between the KS-K6012

Wireless FM Car Kit (\$49.95), the KS-K6013 Home Kit (\$49.95), and the KS-SB200 Boom Box (\$129.95).

Accessory Alternatives

Raise your hand if you've ever heard your dad tell you that he already has everything he could ever want. This may be no help at gift-giving time, but take comfort in one thing: Even if he really does have all the gadgets he can use, there must be a perfect add-on for one of them.

Raise your
hand if you've
ever heard
your dad tell
you that he
already has
everything he
wants.



Bushnell Yardage Pro Scout
\$385.95 • www.bushnell.com


For the office dweller. Multitasking is the way of the work world, and anything that provides hands-off, cordless freedom will help boost productivity. Plantronics' Pulsar 590A Bluetooth Stereo Headset (\$249.95; www.plantronics.com) works with a variety of devices, including music players, computers, PDAs, TVs, and Bluetooth-equipped cell phones. With its telescoping microphone, Dad can instantly toggle between player input and incoming calls.

For the vulnerable. If he has a device he likes to carry around—a notebook computer, PDA, cell phone, music player—does he carry it in a case that provides adequate protection? If not, do him a favor and buy him that bit of insurance against mishaps. You'll find cases for devices large and small at Timbuk2 (www.timbuk2.com) and RoadWired (www.roadwired.com). The cleverest, most versatile design we have seen lately is Timbuk2's

Outtawhack Day Pack (\$100), a notebook computer case (with smaller compartments for an MP3 player and other items) that you can carry by its handle or shoulder strap or instantly convert into a backpack.

For dads with smaller gadgets and upscale tastes, check out Coach's BlackBerry Case for PDAs (\$98; www.coach.com) or Burberry's Check iPod Case (\$150; www.burberry.com).

Start Early

No doubt about it: Dads can be among the toughest people on your list to shop for. But if you give yourself ample time for research and keep your options open, you're sure to come up with something that will make your dad's 2006 Hall of Fame. 

BY BRIAN HODGE

Golf Gadgets

If your dad defines golf as a good walk spoiled, there's no need to read any further. But if he knows his woods from his irons, you may want to look for a gadget or two he can use to get more out of his game.

For advancing from the tee to the cup in as few strokes as possible, there's Bushnell's Yardage Pro Scout (\$385.95; www.bushnell.com), a laser rangefinder accurate from 10 to 700 yards.

If he's working to fine-tune his swing, Beltronics' SwingMate (\$139.95; www.beltronics.com) will give him plenty of feedback. It uses radar to measure the club speed and calculates the distance the ball should travel.

While on the links, he can leave the pencil and paper at home if he's brought Smart 21's eCaddy Digital Golf Scorecard (\$49.95; www.smart21.com). It will track the scores of up to four players and let your dad input handicaps, pars, and more. ●



Gifts For Granddad

Grandfathers come in all shapes and sizes but tend to have one thing in common: They adore their grandkids. Anything that reminds them of the youngsters or helps the generations keep in touch is bound to go over well.

If he spends a lot of time at his desk, consider a digital photo frame such as Pacific Digital's 8-inch MV800 Digital Photo Frame Memory-Frame (\$229.99; www.pacificdigital.com). Load it with a slideshow of favorite family snapshots, and play videos and MP3s.

If he's the talkative type, how about a prepaid calling card from his phone company? Or if he's pondering a transition from land line to cell phone, why not help him make the leap? You could go with a prepaid phone from a provider such as TracFone (\$19.99 and

up; www.tracfone.com) or even add him to your carrier's plan.

Overall, cell phones are designed to appeal more to a youthful market than to retirement-aged (or those getting close) users. If design is a concern, we recommend taking these features into consideration before buying a phone:

- Instead of a tiny wafer of a phone, your grandfather may prefer one that looks and feels more substantial.
- If his eyes aren't as sharp as they used to be, he'll appreciate an uncomplicated layout and larger buttons.
- A brick-style phone may give your granddad's hand more to hold onto than a flip or swivel phone. However, he'll need to activate a keypad lock to avoid making accidental calls while the phone is jostling

around in his pocket. If you don't think your grandfather will adapt well to this, you're probably better off getting him a flip or swivel phone.

And now for the phones. Although we furnish MSRPs, the figures are often meaningless. You can get the phones for huge discounts—and often free—depending on the calling plan.

Nokia 6016i (\$149.99; www.nokia.usa.com). This basic, brick-style phone features big rubberized buttons that feel great under your fingers.

Samsung SGH-X495 (\$274.99; www.samsung.com). This flip phone's strengths include a simple menu and excellent screen graphics.

Sanyo RL-4930 (\$449.99; www.sanyo.com). This brick-style phone is solid, with well-separated buttons. ●



Tweedy Pie
\$250
www.melissabethdesigns.com

Gifts For Grads

Grant Your Graduate's Wishes

College graduation is a rite of passage—a time to rejoice over completing four long years of study; a time to prepare for arrival in the “real world.” In an informal survey of students graduating from Smith College, the nation’s largest women’s college, the most commonly wished-for graduation gifts (by a landslide) were iPods, cell phones, and digital cameras. It’s a safe bet that the grads in your life share these three wishes.

Pod People

If it’s an iPod dream you want to fulfill, there are three models to choose from: the shuffle, nano, and video iPods. Prices range from \$69 (for the 512MB shuffle) to \$399 for the 60GB iPod.

The shuffle is the smallest iPod—it probably weighs less than your graduate’s dorm key—and has the smallest

effect on your wallet. The 1GB model (\$99) holds a respectable 240 songs and plugs into a USB port, which makes loading new songs (or deleting old ones) a cinch. Just like a regular flash-based drive, it stores nonaudio files (such as her resume). Unlike the pricier iPods, this one only comes in one color (white), has no display, and plays songs in random shuffle mode (hence the name).

If you have \$200 in your commencement gift fund, we recommend the 2GB nano (\$199). This flash-based player doesn’t skip, which means it’s great to jog, walk, and travel with. The nano has a 1.5-inch backlit color display, and the new 1GB model (\$149) can hold not only music files, but also roughly 15,000 digital images. It comes in two colors (black and white) and weighs just 1.5 ounces.

If the sky’s the limit, go for the 60GB video iPod (\$399). With a 2.5-inch color display, enough capacity for 15,000 songs, 25,000 photos, or 150 hours of video, the iPod is the *crème de la crème* of MP3 players. Like the nano, it comes in black or white, and if you order any of the three varieties of iPods directly from Apple (store.apple.com), you’ll get free laser engraving and free shipping.

Phone Home

Buying a mobile phone for someone else is tricky. If she already has a plan, be sure you know what it is so that you can buy a compatible phone. It’s also helpful to know how much time she has left on her contract and whether she likes her carrier or is hoping to switch.

If you’ll be starting her off with her first phone, find out which provider offers the best plans and reception in her area. The best deals on phones come from carrier discounts, which are offered only at the time you (or she) sign up.

Unless you’re putting the contract in your name and paying the bill, you may find that the wisest choice is a gift card, so she can choose the plan and the phone herself. Verizon Wireless (www.verizonwireless.com), for example, offers gift cards worth up to \$250 that can be used to buy merchandise (such as a new phone) or to pay her wireless bill. A gift card is also an excellent way to help her defray the cost of activating a new phone on her existing plan.

As for the phones themselves, if she's traveling or living internationally, a GSM phone is your graduate's best choice; we love the Nokia 8801 (\$799.99; www.nokiausa.com). For Verizon subscribers, the new Motorola RAZR V3c (\$249.99; www.verizonwireless.com) is our top choice. For music lovers, the Motorola ROKR (\$149.99; onlinestorez.cingular.com), which comes with iTunes software, is a hip choice. And the Nextel i870 from Motorola (\$449.99; nextelonline.nextel.com) and available through Sprint Nextel, plays MP3s, is Bluetooth-enabled, and supports the popular Group Walkie-Talkie service.

If the graduate you're shopping for wants a phone but doesn't want to be locked into a contract, Tracfone (www.tracfone.com), with just under 5 million subscribers, is the largest prepaid wireless provider in the United States. You can buy phones online or at retailers, such as Radio Shack, for as little as \$19.99. Buy minute bundles by the year or month or on phone cards with rates that range between 30 and 40 cents per minute.

Say Cheese

For the amateur photographer, the Samsung GX-1S D-SLR camera (Price TBA; www.samsungcamerausa.com) is as near as it comes to a dream come true. Among the newest point-and-shoot cameras, Casio's EXILIM ZOOM EX-Z850 (\$399.99; www.casiousa.com) stands out for its high resolution (8.1MP) and extensive feature set, which includes a new "eBay Best Shot Mode" that optimizes photographs

For music lovers, the Motorola ROKR (\$149.99; onlinestorez.cingular.com), which comes with iTunes software, is a hip choice.

specifically for display on eBay (www.ebay.com).

If your shutterbug already has a camera she likes, wrap up a peripheral, such as the Canon PIXMA MP950 Printer All-in-One (\$399.99; www.usa.canon.com), or an accessory, such as a camera bag or flash memory card

For Older Or Younger Graduates

Among high school graduates, iPod fever may rage even stronger than among college grads. Although any iPod is likely to delight your teen, the video iPod (30GB \$299, 60GB \$399; www.ipod.com) is, by far, the coolest. In addition to playing digital music and podcasts, your grad can use it to download TV shows and other video content. To make the gift complete, throw in a set of headphones such as the Etymotic 6i Isolator (\$149; www.etymotic.com) in-ear earphones or the Koss KSC75 SportClip (\$19.99; www.koss.com).

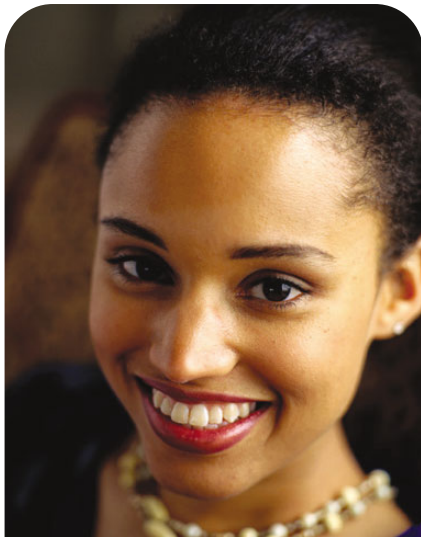
For graduate school, or other graduates, some top-notch CE devices are definitely in order—she's worked hard for those new letters after her name. Surprise her with the Sony BRAVIA KDL-V40XBR1 40-inch LCD HDTV (\$3,499.99; www.sonymstyle.com). For a full-on home-theater experience, add the Sony Wireless DVD Dream System DAV-FX100W (\$899.95) and top it off with a set of Sony 900MHz RF Wireless Headphones MDR-RF960RK (\$99.99). If that's a bit much, make her life easier with the iRobot Scooba (\$399.99; www.irobot.com), which vacuums and washes floors all by itself. ●



case. We love the chic-but-practical LeSportsac 7534 Cargo Camera bag (\$54; www.lesportsac.com). And the practical (but not chic) Advanced Protection System Media/Accessory Wallet from RoadWired (\$19.95; www.roadwired.com) is a useful gift for a camera buff, as well.

On The Job

If you're looking to give a gift geared toward her new career or a graduate



What A Girl Wants

To help ensure that you find the perfect gift—the kind that will make her exclaim, “It’s exactly what I wanted!”—ask your graduate to create her own online gift registry. There are a variety of options available, but we like Findgift.com, a free online registry that’s easy to sign up for (with no strings attached). At Findgift.com graduates can add any item from any store on the Web, or they can choose from the hundreds of gifts suggested by the Gift Wizard. ●

program, now’s the time to upgrade her laptop. Some of us are very loyal to our brands, so do some detective work before you buy. Find out which manufacturer and operating system she prefers and what her priorities are. If she wants portability, try the Sony VAIO FS745P/H (\$1,299.99; www.sonystyle.com). It’s a slender, lightweight notebook (running Windows XP) with Wi-Fi (802.11b/g) built-in, so she’ll be able to work wherever she can find a hotspot. If she needs speed, the new Apple MacBook Pro (starting at \$1,999; www.apple.com) is a lightning-fast Mac OS system built on the innovative Intel Core Duo chip.

Of course, whether she has a new laptop or an old one, a professional-looking (and preferably gorgeous) laptop bag is a must. We like the new Patent Leather London Tote from Mobile Edge (\$119.99; www.mobileedge.com), the Tweedy Pie from Melissa Beth Designs

her a flash drive shaped like sushi, a rubber ducky, or a stuffed alligator (prices, styles, and sizes vary; www.dynamism.com).

Drive Away


The ultimate graduation gift, of course, is a car. If you’d like to tie a big red ribbon on the most CE-friendly car around, go for the 2006 Toyota Prius (starting at \$21,725; www.toyota.com/prius). Aside from being a cutting-edge hybrid vehicle (and cute to boot), the Prius CE options include an audio jack for iPods and other MP3/WMA players; a 6-disc in-dash CD changer with nine speakers in seven locations; built-in Bluetooth for hands-free phone use; a voice-activated DVD navigation system; support for XM Satellite Radio; and a backup camera that can be viewed on the 7-inch LCD (called an MID or Multi Information Display) located in the dash. This MID is also

Of course, whether she has a new laptop or an old one, a professional-looking (and preferably gorgeous) laptop bag is a must.

(\$250; www.melissabethdesigns.com), and the Metro from Women in Business (\$99; www.wibbags.com).

If your grad prefers not to tote her laptop with her everywhere she goes, a Smart USB flash drive such as the 1GB Kingston U3 DataTraveler (\$59; www.kingston.com) can store software, preferences, profiles, and data on a device smaller than a pack of gum. Or if she has a quirky sense of humor, give

where you’ll control all of the vehicle’s other features, as well, including the radio and sound system and the car’s interior temperature.

Whether you opt for a car or something smaller, this year there’s no doubt that CE gifts are among the hottest gifts a grad can get. 

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

Editor's Top 10

Reasons I Love These Devices

CE Lifestyles editor Katie Sommer almost always goes the tech route when she has to buy gifts. Here's why she loves this season of buying cool CE gear for her mom, her dad, and all the graduates in her life, and she'll also give a few good ideas of what to buy for the person who has everything.

1 Moms are generally wonderfully generous people, so mine will let me borrow the digital camera I'm giving her whenever I want.

2 A stylish laptop tote for a college graduate is one of those rare gifts that is truly both fun and functional.

3 If your dad is getting older, a new cell phone can also help you rest easy knowing that he can call for help if he ever needs it.

4 You can use your own CE devices—such as a computer, a digital camera, some photo paper, and a photo printer—to help your children create cards for their grandma and grandpa. Often, these sorts of homemade gifts are Grandma and Grandpa's favorites.

5 If you give a high school graduate an MP3 player for her graduation, she'll think it's the coolest gift ever. Little does she know that she'll use it to take files of her schoolwork with her to the library, too.




6 Need a great group gift for a college graduate? Send her out into the professional world with a new laptop computer.

7 If you have some new parents in your life, give them a joint Mother's Day and Father's Day

gift. Include a digital camera, a gift certificate to your favorite photo-sharing Web site, and a couple of baby-themed frames and wrap it all in a photo-storage box.

8 When your dad retires, he might need a new hobby. Give him a digital camcorder and some DVD-Rs and show him how to use your favorite video-editing program, so he can create interesting and meaningful home movies.

9 Moms deserve rest and relaxation perhaps more than any of us. Give her a stereo dock for her iPod, so she can listen to her tunes more comfortably as she naps and dozes.

10 If your dad has a green thumb and likes to listen to music when he's out in the yard, consider noise-cancellation headphones, which can help block out noise from a lawn mower or a weed whacker. 

BY KATIE SOMMER

Tips

Customize Your Gift Wrap



Two Gifts In One

A paper-wrapped gift looks just fine, but a personalized package means more. For an extra special touch, create a gift box your mom or other loved one will enjoy as much as the actual gift. Grab a stack of photos that commemorate times you've spent with Mom and the rest of the family. Then, trim the photos and paste them onto an appropriately sized box. Finish with a coat of decoupage to seal in the memories. Once dry, you'll have a beautiful gift box that requires no additional wrapping and two gifts to show how much you care.

Create A Customized Roll

There are many ways to wrap a gift, and the most common typically involves wrapping paper. Although wrapping paper can be pretty, it usually isn't very personal. To add some pizzazz to your gift, order a customized roll of gift wrap from a retailer such as PicturePaper.com (\$14.95 for a 6-foot roll; www.picturepaper.com). Your customized roll will include your selected pictures in a pattern of your choice. A striped pattern in school colors with a picture of your nephew on his first day of school will make great wrapping paper for his graduation gift.

Sentimental Sacks


Some gifts, such as a bottle of wine or a large piece of artwork, are difficult to wrap due to their unique shapes and sizes. An easy wrapping alternative is to use a fabric gift sack. For example, with Mother's Day right around the corner, you could print a picture of the kids on iron-on transfer paper and transfer it to a fabric sack that you picked up at the local hobby

store. Not only will your mom appreciate the gift, but she'll also treasure the sentimental wrapping.

Photo IDs

Get the little ones in on the action of gift giving. Instead of using a traditional To/From tag, get creative. Print out a few of your favorite digital photos and ask the kids to cut out pictures of the recipient and your family. Then, paste the cutouts onto the package to display the giver and receiver. This is especially great if you have a niece or nephew graduating and want to involve your kids. Even if your little princess is still learning her ABCs, she'll know who the gift is for by "reading" the picture tag.

Beautiful Bags

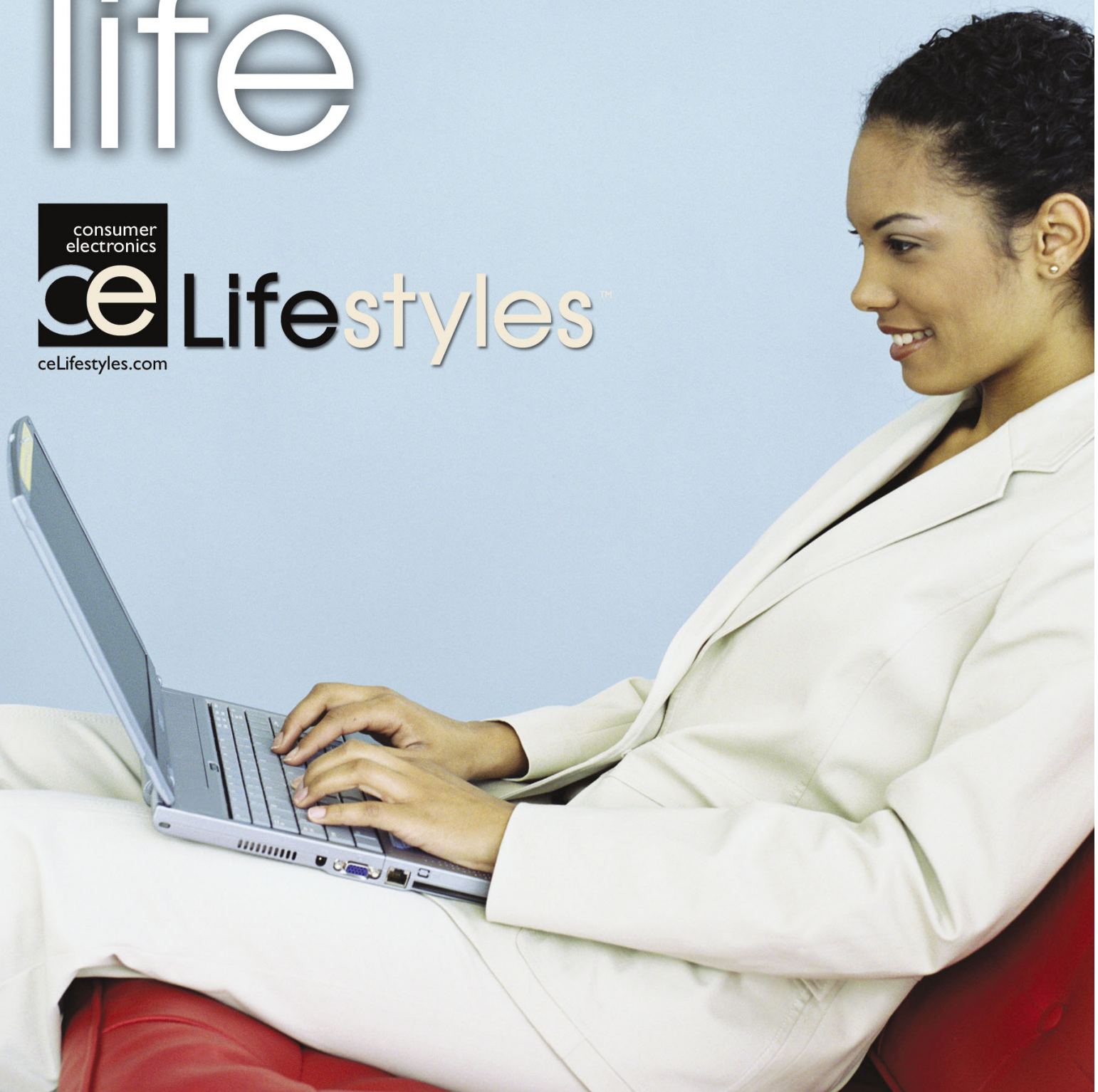
Many people like to use gift bags to wrap presents because they are very easy to use. For a simple, yet personal look, buy a bag in a solid color that matches a photo of the recipient doing something he loves. Then, cut and paste copies of the picture onto the two larger sides of the bag. An olive green or tan bag with pictures of dad holding his prized fish will make an excellent wrap for some new fishing gear for Father's Day. Instead of pasting a traditional 4- x 6-inch photo to the bag, cut the photo into a unique shape, such as a square, circle, or triangle for extra creative flare. 

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

technology for your life



ce Lifestyles™





Best Budget Digital Cameras

A Bundle Of Features For A Bit Of Cash

Not long ago you would've had a problem finding a decent digital camera for \$400. These days, the biggest problem is in choosing from dozens of options in that price category. Here are four budget-priced cameras that will give you the power to take outstanding pictures without putting the squeeze on your checking account.

More Than Megapixels


The first specification many electronics store salespeople tout is megapixels, but truth be told, resolution isn't as big of a deal as it used to be. If you just want a camera for casual picture taking and you don't plan on printing larger than 8 x 10, a model with 4MP or more should be plenty. The major exception is if you tend to crop a lot of the image away as you edit your photos; in these cases, extra megapixels come in handy.

As you research cameras, you'll also be bombarded with figures about optical and digital zoom. With a few notable exceptions, optical zoom, which uses the lens to magnify subjects, usually tops at 3X or 4X in point-and-shoot cameras. Don't bother checking out digital zoom specs because this type of zoom uses software tricks to make subjects look larger and tends to degrade image quality. Instead of worrying about digital zoom, notice how fast or slow the camera's optical zoom works, and how well it locks onto its targets.

Because digital cameras devour power like mad, battery type may play a huge role in your buying decision. It's easy to buy AA batteries at a gas station when you're on a road trip, but if your camera uses a proprietary Li-Ion power pack, you'll have to recharge at your nearest power outlet or invest in a pricey car charger. On the other hand, Li-Ion packs tend to last much longer, and they allow

for smaller camera designs. If the camera you choose accepts AA batteries, you can invest in rechargeable AA batteries to save money in the long run and to reduce the number of batteries you have to recycle.

Finally, A Flash Card

As you budget for your camera purchase, set aside some cash for a flash card. Expect to pay at least \$50 for a 512MB card, which will let you take plenty of photos and video clips without worrying about running out of room on your card. Stick with name-brand cards made with high-quality memory, so you won't have to worry about corrupted image files. Thus equipped, you'll have everything you need to capture memorable photos for years to come. 

BY NATHAN CHANDLER



Megapixels:	7.1
Video features:	Maximum 60fps (frames per second); on-camera editing
Optical zoom:	4X
Digital zoom:	4X
Battery type:	AA
Flash card format:	SD/MMC
Why it shines:	Full slate of automatic and cleverly integrated manual features in a sleek body

Canon PowerShot A620

When Canon really tries, few companies can match its ability to cram dozens of features into a compact, budget-priced camera. With the A620, Canon may have even topped itself.

The 7.1MP A620 comes in a classy dark silver case and is equipped with a 4X optical zoom lens. You can focus using the optical viewfinder or preview your subject with the fold-out, twisting 2-inch LCD, which helps you take pictures no matter how awkward the angle.

It looks much like a basic point-and-shoot model, but this Canon comes fully loaded with controls to let you manage almost every aspect of picture taking. You can use an automated mode or switch to shutter- or aperture-priority, full manual, or even a customizable mode. There's also a custom white balance setting, flash power output control, and a bevy of preset scene modes for people who don't want to mess with extra settings.

All of those features do take a toll. With its four AA batteries in place, the camera weighs in at 12 ounces, almost as much as the one-pound Fujifilm S5200, so although it's compact, the A620 will add some heft to your purse.

Although each of our four budget picks are worthy for various purposes, the A620 is the most well-rounded of the bunch and should make both beginning and advanced photographers very happy.



Megapixels:	5
Video features:	Maximum 30fps; on-camera video editing
Optical zoom:	5X
Digital zoom:	4X
Battery type:	Li-Ion
Flash card format:	32MB internal / SD/MMC
Why it shines:	Compact, easy to use, speedy operation

Kodak EasyShare V570

The EasyShare V570 is one of the funkiest-looking cameras to emerge from Kodak's factories. Powered off, the lustrous, almost artful body exudes simplicity and style. Press the On button, and the lens cover slips back to reveal not one, but two lenses.

The reason for the dual-lens setup is simple. Kodak wanted to create a slim-bodied camera (less than 1 inch wide) with 5X zoom, including an ultra-wide lens, but a single lens would've required a significantly thicker build. The answer: two skinny lenses instead of a single big one.

The wide-angle lens here is so wide that you can cover 180 degrees in three shots. And in a nice bit of digital wizardry, the camera will stitch shots together in the camera, letting you create panoramic shots without a PC. There's even an integrated feature that corrects for wide-angle lens distortion in the camera, so you don't have to fix these problems with editing software. On the back side, the V570 features a 2.5-inch color LCD, five control buttons, a five-way controller, and a thumb pad for the zoom.

There are some middling concerns with this camera. Because there's no optical viewfinder, you'll have to lean heavily on the power-hungry LCD, and thus, the Li-Ion battery pack. And like many EasyShare models, this one is short on manual controls. It is, however, exceedingly easy to use. Paired with its handsome aesthetics and snappy operation, this is one super-compact model sure to please just about anyone who loves taking snapshots.

Olympus SP-350

Not long ago, 8MP cameras were a pipedream for those who wanted a compact, inexpensive camera. For those folks, the Olympus SP-350 is dream come true.

In addition to sporting an 8MP sensor, this Olympus is small enough to fit in a snug jeans pocket and powerful enough to sate the shooting needs of novices and advanced amateurs. It comes with a 2.5-inch color monitor, 30 scene modes, and options that give you full control over shutter and aperture settings.

Even though the SP-350 is tiny (it's only 4 inches wide and 2.5 inches tall), it comes with a 3X optical zoom lens and has a threaded lens barrel that lets you attach either a wide conversion or telephoto lens. What's more, this is the only camera we included that comes with an integrated hot shoe, so you use a much more powerful external flash.

If you love to fiddle with an endless array of features, this one has a long list of frills. There's a Super Macro mode that lets you get as close as an inch to intricately detailed but tiny subjects. You can record video clips directly into QuickTime format and engage the Movement Compensation feature to reduce annoying hand shake. And when you play back pictures, you can sort them by date, so you don't have to flip through every image on your flash card. In short, if you want an adaptable, very portable camera with high resolution, few models can match the SP-350.



Megapixels:	8
Video features:	Maximum 30fps; mic and speaker
Optical zoom:	3X
Digital zoom:	5X
Battery type:	CR-V3 or AA
Flash card format:	25MB internal / xD Card
Why it shines:	High resolution, compact size, and loaded with extra features

Fujifilm FinePix S5200

Packing a lot of extra features into a camera is one good way to tempt buyers, but there's one capability—optical zoom—that no amount of digital wizardry can duplicate. A powerful zoom often pushes a camera out of the budget category, but Fujifilm managed to keep the S5200 price low while including a lens capable of 10x magnification, more than three times the 3X optical zoom you'll find on typical point-and-shoot digital cameras.

The camera records still images using a 5MP sensor, and in spite of its large lens, also has video clip capabilities. If you decide you want the ability to take wide-angle shots, too, the S5200 will let you add on an optional wide-angle adapter.

You can shoot in Auto mode if you like, but you'll also have adjustable settings at your fingertips, including shutter- and aperture-priority modes, as well as a full manual mode. There are five preset scene modes, and more important, there's an anti-blur feature to help keep your pictures sharp even when you're shooting at the telephoto end of your focal range (which is more likely to amplify natural vibrations from your hands).

As with the Kodak, this one doesn't have an optical viewfinder. The S5200 has a 1.8-inch color monitor and an EVF (electronic viewfinder), both of which require juice from the four AA batteries.

Although it's by far the biggest camera in our selections, the S5200 offers a huge zoom lens and a healthy helping of automatic and manual features at an affordable price.



Megapixels:	5.1
Video features:	Maximum 30fps; mic and speaker
Optical zoom:	10X
Digital zoom:	5.7X
Battery type:	AA
Flash card format:	xD Card
Why it shines:	Tremendous zoom capability for the price

Digital Camera Shopping Tips

Find The Perfect Digicam

BY KATIE SOMMER

Everyone needs a digital camera, and with technology improving and prices going down, now is a great time to buy. But there are so many models on today's market that it can be overwhelming shopping for one. Here are a few shopping tips, as well as a checklist and an area for notes, that will help you make the best decision for you and your family.

If you have children, consider a camera that is a little heftier than the super-slim models that are so popular right now. The extra room on the body of the camera can make it easier for little hands to hold, and you won't have to constantly have to worry that Susie will accidentally drop it.

Make sure you factor in the cost of a memory card. Most digital cameras have minimal onboard storage space, so count on buying a 256MB or larger card. If your camera's resolution is fairly high (say, 6MP or above), or if you like the camera's video function, consider a card that is 1 or 2GB.

The "sweet spot" of digital cameras resolutions right now is 5MP, which means fairly low price points for the quality. This is a good number to start with because you'll be able to make nice enlargements, too.

Carefully consider a camera's battery. The cost of disposable alkaline batteries can add up over time, so if your camera uses AA batteries, consider purchasing rechargeable batteries and a charger. If it has a built-in Li-Ion battery and charging dock, make sure you set a charging routine because (unlike AA batteries, which you can change any time you want) you're basically stuck until you take the time to recharge it if your Li-Ion battery runs out of juice.

Before you shop, make sure you evaluate whether you want to make prints at home. Printers and their cartridges are often quite costly, so you'll have to adjust your budget accordingly. Likewise, if you decide you want to make prints somewhere else, consider a photo-sharing site. Web sites such as Winkflash (www.winkflash.com) offer excellent-quality prints at a low price, but you'll need a high-speed Internet connection to make transferring those photo files easier.

Even if you plan on buying the camera online, make sure you physically handle the camera first. Is it too heavy? Too light? Does your thumb cover up part of the LCD? Does it feel OK in your purse? The answers to these questions will help you make a better decision.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

☐ Comparison shop

How much does the camera cost at Best Buy? Amazon.com? Target?

☐ Handle it first

How does the camera feel in your hand? In your purse? Is it too heavy for your child to use?

☐ Accessories

Will you need to purchase a camera case? How about a memory card? Extra batteries? Paper and ink for your photo printer?

☐ Know your zoom

It's safe to ignore the digital zoom capabilities of the camera. Focus on the optical zoom instead.

☐ Firsthand results

Ask the store associate if they can show you prints they've made with the model you're interested in.

☐ Notes

Questions To Ask

When Buying A Digital Camcorder

Digital camcorders continue to be hot items, snatched off the shelves by first-time buyers and veteran users ready to replace earlier models. Regardless of which group you fall into, you'll want to make sure you end up with a camera that's right for you. Here's a list of questions to tear out or photocopy. Take the questions to your local Best Buy or Circuit City and put them to your sales representative or answer them for yourself.

What recording format does it use?

Your most plentiful choices will be MiniDV cassette (although some camcorders use the less widely supported Digital8 cassette format) and recordable DVD. In the future, though, we're likely to see more camcorders such as JVC's Everio G series, which record to built-in hard drives (\$699.99 and up; www.jvc.com). You may want to hear a rundown of each format's advantages and disadvantages.

Does it have three color chips or one?

A 3 CCD (charge-coupled device) camcorder processes the primary colors—red, green, and blue—separately, for richer color.

Is it ready for widescreen?

Even if you don't have a widescreen TV yet, one day you probably will. You may want to anticipate that day with a camcorder that lets you choose a widescreen aspect ratio (16:9) or even one that shoots in high definition.

What other features does it have?

Features to look for include programmed exposure modes and special effects, and you may want the ability to add text to your footage. Only you can say what's important and what's superfluous.

Where is the microphone mounted?

A front-mounted mic will pick up sound better than a top-mounted mic.

How powerful is the optical zoom?

The higher the number, the more distance it will cover. Ignore the digital zoom figure, however. It has almost no practical value.

What night mode technology does it have?


Some camcorders switch on a small, front-mounted lamp that helps to keep colors looking more natural, but it is effective only at a short range. Other

models use infrared, which extends the effective range but gives your footage a somewhat eerie green or gray cast. Either way, you'll need to be prepared to trade off something.

How expandable is it in case I want to add accessories?

Of primary importance here is an accessory shoe, which will hold (and, if it is what's called a hot shoe, power) additions such as a better microphone or a more powerful light attachment. Some cameras also let you screw on lens attachments such as wide-angle extenders and filters.

Can I try it out?

There's simply no substitute for hands-on experience. You really want to get a feel for the camcorder to make sure its controls are comfortable and its menu system is intuitive. 

BY BRIAN HODGE



Photography Technique Tip

This Month: Frozen Motion



A fast shutter speed is the single most important factor in capturing wow-inducing, stop-action photographs. Thanks to savvy engineering, many point-and-shoot digital cameras have a shutter-priority, manual, or custom mode that lets you adjust shutter speed to your liking.

If you're not sure how to adjust the shutter speed on your camera, consult your owner's manual first.

If your camera has a shutter-priority mode (often denoted with the "Tv" symbol), we suggest using it, as you can manipulate the shutter speed while the camera automatically controls aperture and other settings. Next, play with shutter speeds (try 1/100 in medium light; 1/500 in bright light) until you find a speed that adequately stops a moving subject.

If your shutter speed is fast enough to freeze action but your picture is underexposed, try adjusting the ISO (International Standards Organization) setting, which


changes your camera image sensor's sensitivity to light. Increasing the ISO setting will brighten your picture at the given shutter speed. So if you're using ISO 100 at a shutter speed of 1/100 but your subjects are just a bit too dark, using ISO 200 will brighten the shot while keeping blurriness to a minimum.

Remember to keep the ISO as low as possible for general purposes; the trade-off with high ISO settings (400 and higher) is graininess and noise. You may also need to use your flash or find another light source for extra illumination.

Achieving sharp focus is one of the hardest parts of taking stop-action

shots because auto-focus mechanisms are often too slow to keep up with high-speed subjects. Switch to manual focus and then lock onto an object near the area where you anticipate your moving subject will be. Then you can simply snap the shot as your subject comes into view. To increase your chances of getting an extraordinary shot, take more pictures. Use your camera's high-speed (or burst) shooting mode, so you can capture an entire series of images.

As you're shooting, smoothly follow the movement of your subject. Use a monopod or tripod when shooting swift targets, or you'll risk introducing hand shake that causes blurriness. Just loosen the tripod's head, and you can follow movement while keeping the camera relatively steady. Don't neglect to experiment with this technique. For example, if you use a slower shutter speed while panning, you can capture a sharp subject while creating a blurred background that creates the illusion of motion.

In our example image, we used a very high shutter speed (1/2000; ISO 200) to counter a bright sunrise and panned slowly to follow the pelicans' flight. As a result, even the very tips of the birds' flapping wings appear motionless and well-defined. 

BY NATHAN CHANDLER

These pelicans were zooming along the surface of the water on a foggy morning, but a fast shutter speed completely froze their motion.



Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

Everybody has them: photos that date back many years, maybe many decades, whose negatives are long gone. Maybe they even predate film and were taken on photographic plates. Either way, they're irreplaceable and perhaps by now aren't in great shape.

Digital technology is your best ally, letting you salvage and preserve a disintegrating

image. It can be an involved process, so over the next few installments, we'll cover the common repairs your photo may require, starting with scratches and similar damage.

Your first step is to scan the print into your computer. Use settings that will give you lots of pixel detail to work with. 200% of the original size and 600dpi (dots per inch) is a good rule of thumb, even if you plan to reprint it smaller and at the usual printer setting of 300dpi.

Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

1

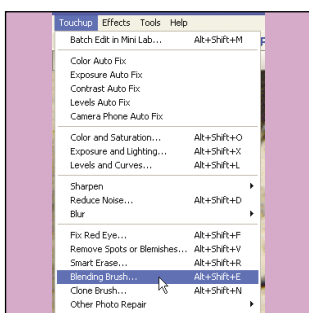
Increase the Zoom until you have a clear view of the scratches marring the image.



The Blending Brush also copies pixels into another location, but it mixes them for a smoother, subtler effect. Click to set your starting point then click-and-drag along the scratches. In the Activity Panel, reset the starting point whenever it goes into an unwanted area.

2

Although DIP has a scratch removal tool, we find that its results are almost as noticeable as the scratches. Here's a better option: From the Touchup menu, select the Blending Brush.

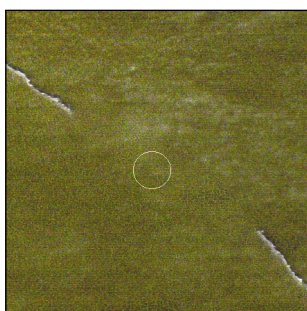
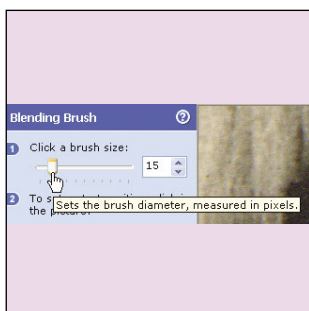


5

You may need a larger brush size, but you can also use the Blending Brush to erase creases in the photo.

3

In the Activity Panel, set your brush size. Unless your scratches are wide gouges, you should be able to keep it quite small.

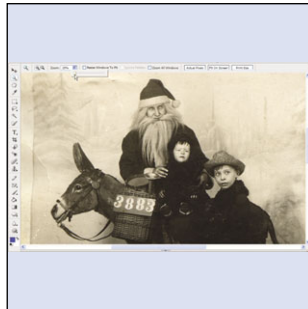


6

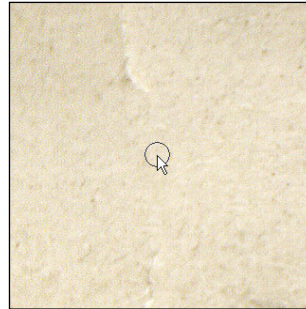
It's also good for removing juncture lines where you've taped a torn print.

Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

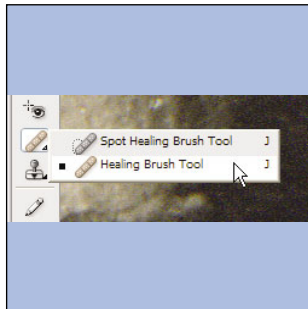
1
Open your photo in Standard Edit view and increase the Zoom level for a close-up look at the damage.



5
Repeat the process to smooth out creases that your scan may have picked up from the print.



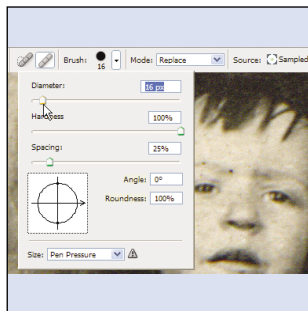
2
Select the Healing Brush from the toolbar. This works the same as Digital Image Pro's Blending Brush.



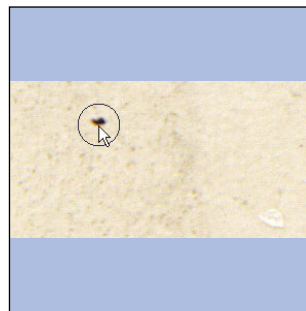
6
Say goodbye to the scars of physical repair jobs.



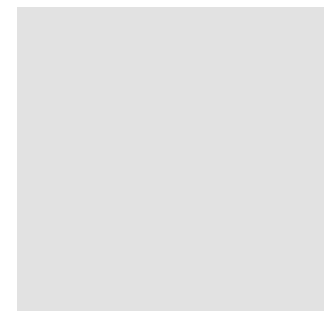
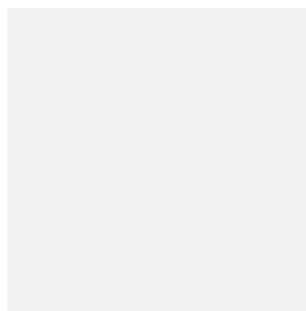
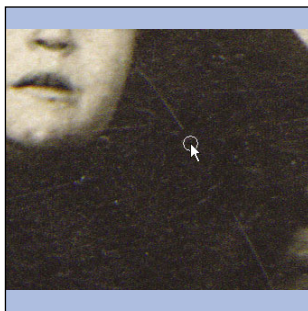
3
In the Options Bar, set your brush size a little wider than the scratch. Set the Source radio button on Sampled. For starters, set Mode to Replace and check the Aligned option, but you may want to experiment with these.



PSE has a variation on the Healing Brush called the Spot Healing Brush, which is great for eliminating specks, dust, etc. It works the same way, except you don't have to set a starting point. Just set your brush size slightly larger than the spot and click it to make it vanish.



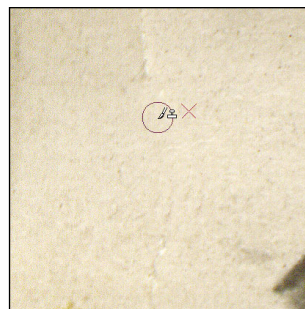
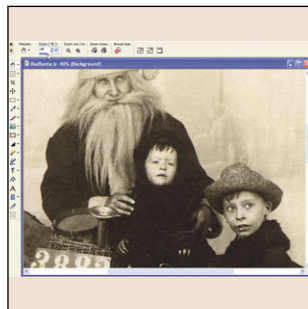
4
ALT-click the image to set a sampling point where you want to start copying pixels. Then click-and-drag over the scratches. ALT-click again whenever you need to reset the starting point and keep it from moving into areas you don't want to use for repairs.



Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

1

Increase the Zoom level, so you can clearly view the scratches.

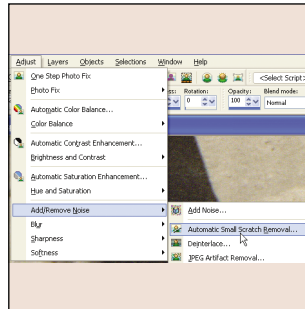
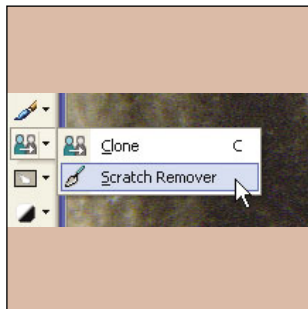


5

For wide, curved damage such as creases and tears, you're probably better off using the Clone Tool to repair them.

2

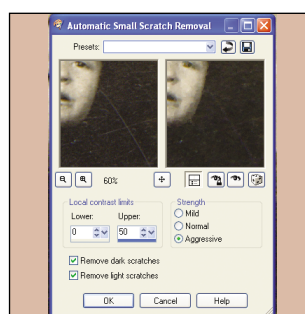
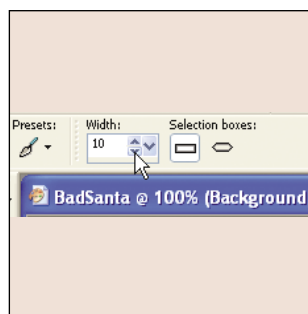
Select the Scratch Remover from the toolbar. PSP has two options for scratch removal; this is the manual method.



3

If your photo suffers from lots of small scratches, try the automatic method instead. From the Adjust menu, select Add/Remove Noise and then Automatic Small Scratch Removal.

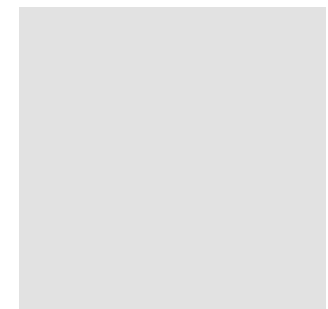
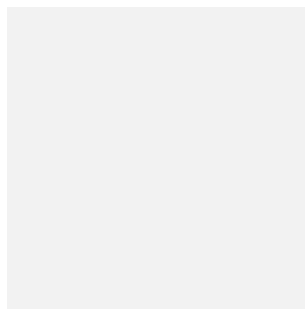
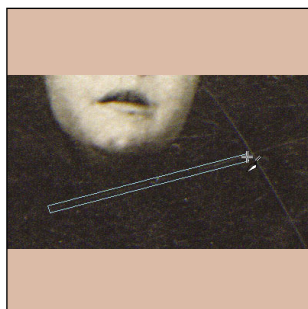
Set the controls in the Options Palette. The Width should barely be wider than the scratch. For the Selection Box, choose the rectangular option if the scratch is perpendicular to an object or is on an open background; use the pointed option if the scratch hits an object at an angle.



4

This gives you a dialog box with before/after panes, so you can see your progress before committing to it. Play around with the various settings until you achieve the best results, but ideally, keep them as conservative as possible to avoid losing image detail.

Click-and-drag to position the selection box over the scratch. Release the mouse button to make the repair. You may need to click Undo a few times to adjust the Width and keep the repair as small as possible.



Digital Photo Project

Photo Shadow Box

BY KATIE SOMMER

There have been a lot of innovations in digital photography in the last five or so years, but one thing that will never change is the fact that photos are 2D. However, you can get an interesting and elegant 3D look with your photos if you follow our instructions below and create a digital photo shadow box.

DIRECTIONS

Use your home scanner and computer to scan in your photos. Resize them, so they'll all fit in the shadow box. We used an 8- x 10-inch shadow box with three photos, so our photos were each around 4 x 3 inches. Print the photos on photo paper and cut them out.

Next, position the photos on the backing of the shadow box. You'll want them to somewhat overlap to get the 3D effect. Once you have an arrangement you like, make light pencil marks on the backing, so you know where to position them with the adhesive.

Place the adhesive squares onto the corners of each photo. To get the 3D effect, you'll have to stack the squares on top of each other for height. For ours, we used a depth of eight squares for the highest photo, five squares for the middle photo, and three squares for the bottom photo.

Carefully place the photos and adhesive on the backing in the places you've marked.

Replace the backing and hang the shadow box.

TIPS

- Use photos with a common theme. For instance, we used three photos from France.
- Use dark-colored mounting squares for a dark-colored backing and light-colored squares for a light backing.
- Close-ups or easily-identifiable subjects (such as our demitasse cup, Eiffel Tower, and Peugeot sign) are best. Chances are the photos will be fairly small, and tiny details will get lost.
- Shadow boxes come in all sizes. For another interesting composition, mount one small photo in each of four 4 x 6 shadow boxes and hang them in a square pattern.
- If you have small keepsakes or trinkets that relate to your photos, add them to the shadow box.



SUPPLIES • Shadow box • Digital photos • Scanner, PC, and photo printer • Photo paper • Adhesive mounting squares (found in the scrapbooking section of most craft stores)

tips

Photo Size Fundamentals

1

Mat Matters

Many photos look more striking if you mat them before putting them behind glass, and you'll find that for photo sizes larger than 8 x 10, it's almost impossible to find a frame that will fit a mat-less print, anyway. If you aren't into crafts projects, don't try to cut a mat yourself, as it's a time-consuming task that takes practice to master. Consult the framing experts at your hobby and crafts store for help on a custom-cut mat and a frame to fit.

2

Humungous Enlargements

Some pundits tell you many digital cameras can't produce high-quality 16 x 20, 20 x 30, or even larger prints, but they're often wrong. If you have an expanse of bare wall and a camera with 4MP or more, print some big enlargements. Several Web sites, such as Pixel Outpost (www.pixeloutpost.com) and Sony ImageStation (www.imagestation.com), create and ship oversized prints from digital files at lower prices than local labs. ImageStation, for example, sells 20 x 30 photos for \$19.99, and Pixel Outpost offers 36 x 48 prints for \$60. You won't have to wonder whether your image file is large enough for a high-quality print because these sites gauge each photo's size and warn you if resolution is insufficient.

3

Resolution Convolutions

When you want to print a favorite photo, be forewarned that if the photo looks fuzzy or noisy on your monitor, there's a good chance you'll see those flaws on paper, too, especially in heavily cropped images. If you want to reduce the chances that you'll waste money on an 8- x 10-inch print that doesn't turn out, print a test photo on 4 x 6 paper first. A 4 x 6 print clearly is much smaller than an 8 x 10, but printing often reveals image flaws, such as jagged details and blurriness, that you might not notice on your computer display. Keep in mind that if you use a 4 or 5MP camera and perform minor cropping, you shouldn't encounter problems making crisp 8 x 10s.

4

Print Size Faux Pas

Most inkjets and printing sites create digital prints at 35mm film sizes such as 4 x 6, 5 x 7, and 8 x 10. However, your camera's image sensor has a different aspect ratio, which is why an image that looks perfect on your monitor might be cropped weirdly—with missing border details or white edges—in print. To avoid surprises, crop images to the proper size before you print or upload them. Your photo-editing software likely has an Image Resize (or similarly named) feature that will let you crop to precise dimensions.

5

Photo Frame Fundamentals

Sometimes, decorating with your prints is the hardest part of the creative process. There are guidelines you can follow to make sure those home photo displays aren't destroying the visual balance of your environment. In general, hang smaller-framed prints in small rooms and save oversized enlargements for bigger living areas where they won't overwhelm viewers. This tip applies to the frame size, so don't think you can get away with hanging an 8 x 10 in a small room if it's preserved in a 16 x 20 frame.



BY NATHAN CHANDLER

Gift Of The Month

Living Cookbook

If you have a mom in your life who loves to cook, we have a gift idea for you that's sure to win rave reviews for years to come. May's Gift Of The Month would make a great Mother's Day gift for moms, grandmas, sisters, daughters, and friends. (Each month we search for a perfect gift you can pick up for less than \$50 for someone you love.) Anyone with a recipe collection (or a need for one, for that matter) will benefit from Radium Technologies' Living Cookbook software (\$29.95; www.livingcookbook.com).

More Than A Cookbook

Although having cookbook software that features more than 900 recipes and lets you add your own would help keep any cook more organized, that's not enough to get us excited about a software package. However, add a nutrition calculator, meal calendar, and grocery list function (to name a few), and our interest is piqued.


With the Living Cookbook, you can create Nutrition Facts labels (much like you would see on items at the grocery store) for your favorite recipes. Enter your recipe and categorize the ingredients using the included database, and the software does the rest. Plan a menu and you can even total the nutritional values for your day.

You can also use your menu to create a shopping list to take to the grocery store and get helpful cooking hints and techniques from the Reference Library. If you prefer a hard copy of your recipe for your collection, use the software to create recipe cards. Or, if you're feeling ambitious, publish your own cookbook using Microsoft Word. The possibilities may be limited only by how much time you have.

Recipe For Thoughtfulness

Despite all of its features, when we first ran across the Living Cookbook, we had our doubts about recommending a digital cookbook as a good idea for a Mother's Day gift. After all, would Mom really be excited by a way to organize recipes, even if it would make her life easier in the long run? But then we started thinking outside the box, and we realized that giving this software could be so much more than a gift of, well, just software. It could be a gift of yourself, as well.

Although we're sure there are moms who would be thrilled to receive the Living Cookbook and be left on their own to install and use it on their own, we're sure there are even more moms who would appreciate a helping hand. That's why we think that to make this year's Mother's Day gift one to remember,

you should give yourself along with the Living Cookbook. Plan a day to sit down with whomever you decide to give the software to and help her get started. We especially like the idea of spending a day with Mom or Grandma, and entering all of your family's traditional recipes. What could be better than a digital family cookbook that can be shared with everyone and treasured for years to come? That, after all, is priceless. 

BY JOY MARTIN



Keep Your CE Gear Organized

Turn Over A New Leaf

Most of us, even if we're self-proclaimed neat freaks, have a mess of tangled cords behind our entertainment centers or PCs. It's almost impossible to prevent, given the types and number of devices that are so popular today. And even if your PC or TV cords are neat and tidy, chances are you have a digital camera, an MP3 player, or a digital camcorder, and those devices mean all sorts of cords, too. Thus is the organizational challenge of

today's consumer electronics user: to keep it all neat, tidy, and easy to find when you need to.

Where You Can't See It

Often, it's what you *can't* see that's important, and that holds true for the hidden cords behind your entertainment center and PC. Tangles of cords lead to dusty places that are hard to clean, which, in turn, can lead to dirty internal components, and all that dust acts like a blanket

and traps heat inside your TV or PC—not good for your devices or your home.

Your PC's cords. For a PC, getting these cords up off the floor is the first step to organization. We especially like the Wiremate (\$19.99; www.wiremate.com), which is a plastic box (with a detachable face) that you can attach to your desk or wall. Inside the Wiremate are several hooks where you can wind your PC's cords. Pop the face back on, and your cords are neatly and safely tucked away.



© 2006 Anthony Lozano

Wire Solution • \$89
• www.superbhometheather.com

Your A/V cords. It's easy to get all gung-ho about a new flat-panel plasma TV. After all, it looks amazing mounted on your wall, and the picture can't be beat. But what is often overlooked is that the cables and cords that come with such a setup will have to either run down your wall underneath the TV or be hidden behind the drywall. For most of us, the latter isn't an option, and the former is quite unattractive.

One of the best answers to this that we've seen is the new Wire Solution (\$89; www.superbhometheater.com), which is a plaster-like channel that hides your TV's cords right on the surface of your wall. The Wire Solution is textured similar to most homes' walls, and you can paint it the same color as the wall on which the TV will be mounted. Once the Wire Solution is correctly installed, all you have to do is place a nice, low-sitting piece of furniture below it, and your TV's cords are literally almost invisible. It's a very easy-to-install, cost-effective solution for any homeowner looking to hide cords for a wall-mounted TV.

Where You Can

Of course, your computer and A/V equipment aren't the only electronics in your home. Most of us have a digital camera, digital camcorder, or MP3 player, too, and all those devices mean a lot of cords, as well as docks, earbuds, and other accessories that are necessary to use your gear.


Digital cameras. A camera with a dock, such as the new Casio Exilim EX-Z850 (\$399.99; www.casio.com), is great because it means you don't have to be bothered with keeping AA batteries on hand; just set the camera in the dock when it needs recharging. But the downside to docks is the storage issue. If you use your camera often, chances are you're recharging it at least a couple of times a week, but it's not the prettiest thing to have sitting out on your desk.

Clear out some space on a closet shelf or a drawer and reserve it specifically for the dock. You'll be able to easily and quickly access it when you need it and hide it when you don't.

MP3 players. If you need a USB cord to charge or transfer music to your MP3 player, check out the "Buy Wisely" sidebar for tips on how to keep it organized and easily identifiable. But your USB cable isn't the only cord for MP3 players—you'll have to deal with your earbuds, too, which unfailingly get tangled in your pocket or purse. Check out PKOH NYC's Earbud Clip (\$9.99 for a four-pack; www.earbudclip.com) for an easy and unobtrusive way to keep your earbuds organized. The tool acts like a

paper clip for your cords when you wind them around your player, but note that it works best with larger devices such as the video iPod (\$299 for 30GB; \$399 for 60GB; www.apple.com/ipod) and Creative Zen MicroPhoto (\$249.99; www.creative.com).

Keep It That Way

Once you get your cords and other CE gear organized, the challenge is keeping them that way. With a few changes to your routine—and your home—you should be able to quickly develop habits that will keep your CE gear where it should be. 

BY KATIE SOMMER

Buy Wisely

If you go looking for organizers or labelers for your digital camera or MP3 player's cords, you'll likely find ones that are expensive, ugly, or both. Often, it's best to look for nonspecific household organizational helpers for something that fits your décor better.

For instance, consider using a jewelry box to organize your cords. Many of them will have larger compartments that are perfect for USB cords and memory cards, and they usually have an elegant, classic shape and finish that would go well in any home office.

Another idea is to look in the paper or party goods aisle of your favorite discount retail store for inexpensive, multipurpose containers. We love this one from Target (\$5.99; www.target.com); the pretty pattern reminds us of a more expensive, painted wooden box, and they're so affordable that you could buy several, one for each type of cord or accessory, and display them grouped together on a shelf.

If labeling is your interest, use masking tape instead of more expensive plastic tags. Just fold a piece of tape around the cord, trim it in a nice shape with a pair of scissors, and use a marker to identify it: this one for your MP3 player, that one for your digital camera, and so on. ●

Multipurpose box • \$5.99 • www.target.com





Our Favorite CE-Related Accessories That Get The Job Done

Expensive accessories for CE devices are everywhere, but we have discovered an inexpensive trove that's well worth looking into. Many of these items may do only one thing, but you'll be surprised to find that these are often the most useful CE accessories.

Unravel Your Troubles

Untangling our earbud cords is one of our least favorite things to do, and tangles aren't good for the earbuds, either. With Cableyoyo Pop (\$9.95; www.cableyoyo.com) you can rid your earbuds of knots and keep those cords tucked away in a neat plastic clip. You can also use the Pop with cords and wires for devices such as cell phones, PDAs, laptops, and MP3 players. With its suction cup, you literally pop your Cableyoyo Pop onto any device's surface, and it can double as a belt clip, which we found useful when hitting the gym with our MP3 player. Cableyoyo Pop includes 10

pop art stickers to add some personality to your cord-managing friend, and it's available in either black or white.

Stash It In Your Laptop

Notebook PC Card slots are typically used for adding extra memory, external hard drives, and other components to your laptop, but now you can use them for storage. That's right; you can actually use your laptop's PC Card slot to hide spare change, media cards, or an extra key or two. StashCard (\$12.95; wireless.gardenstore.com) is a secret compartment that slides into your PC Card slot, adding a convenient small space to store nearly flat items. Whatever you decide to use your StashCard for, you'll know you're making good use of your often empty PC Card slot.

A Charming Tote

It's hard to look fashionable when you're carrying a digicam or video camera to special events, but we found the perfect

case that won't make you look like a pack mule. Targus' Madison Deluxe Camera/Video Case (\$19.99; www.targus.com) is stylish enough that no one will suspect you're carrying your CE gear. Inside the case are two padded compartments (into which you can fit two small cameras or a camera with some personal effects). They're lined with a soft fabric that won't scratch your camera, and adjustable inner compartments fit snugly so your devices aren't damaged during travel. The case has inner and outer zipper pockets where you can easily fit media cards, a tube of lipstick, credit cards, or a cleaning cloth. The exterior of the purse—er, camera case is constructed of soft, durable Koskin with stylish white counter stitching and shiny chrome magnetic snaps. This unassuming accessory is sure to be a hit at your cousin's upcoming wedding.

Under Lock & Key

USB flash drives are such a hit they seem to have turned into the new



Products Under \$20

portable PC. Although these little guys provide portability, they typically have no security feature, which makes your data vulnerable. Data Guard's USB Thumbdrive Lock (\$14.99; www.digitalinnovations.com) thwarts would-be data thieves. The lock fits onto any USB stick device and protects it with a three-digit combination. For added security, the lock is made of rugged metal, and you may change your combination as many times as you please. Not only does this accessory safeguard your data but it also doubles as a sturdy end cap for your USB device (if you've misplaced your original).

Laptop ≠ Heating Pad

If you're a notebook addict, then chances are your hours of use are heating up your laptop. Kensington's LiftOff Portable Notebook Cool Stand (\$19.99; us.kensington.com) may help prevent overheating. The stand lets you adjust tilt and height, which increases air circulation, which allows your laptop

to cool properly. The adjustment feature lets you elevate your laptop to an ergonomic level, preventing neck and eye strain. A nonskid rubber base guarantees that your laptop won't budge while you type, and a handle makes the stand portable; it's compact enough to fit nicely in your laptop bag, as well. With this accessory on your side, you're ready to conquer heat buildup anywhere you go.


Be Adored For Your Adorned CDs

If you find the metallic look of CDs a little drab, why not use a one-of-a-kind, predesigned, silk-screened blank CD-R that's as unique as the data you put on it? Use Sinch's Custom Designed CD-R Bundles (\$7.50 for three, \$14 for six; www.Sinch.com) for various purposes: back up your data; transfer files; and burn MP3s, video, or multimedia presentations or create photo albums of your digital photos to give as gifts to family and friends. Design bundles

come in a variety of themes and include color-coordinated trigger cases. (We loved the ease with which we could pop our CDs in and out of the cases.) From the music bundle to the holiday bundle, you're sure to find something that appeals to you.

Keep A Spotless Screen

Mobile devices such as your notebook PC, PDA, digicam, and cell phone are magnets for fingerprints, smudges, and dust. Keep a pack of Klear Screen Travel Singles (\$9.95; store.klearscreen.com) handy and keep your devices grime-free. Each kit has 12 travel singles packed with one antistatic microchamois.

Needless to say, we love inexpensive accessories, but those that offer innovative solutions for our CE lives are the ones we admire the most. 

BY ASHLEY FINTER



Selma Bag • \$199.99 • www.beteshgroup.com/icon

Airports & Your CE

Security Checks Require Special Care For Your Devices

The American landscape changed dramatically on Sept. 11, 2001. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, one of the most noticeable changes occurred in the way we travel, especially through our nation's airports.

Travelers have grown accustomed to the long lines and security checks that are part of the preboarding routine. Every passenger is potentially subject to a more thorough check, as is her baggage. Smart

travelers pack and dress in such a way that not only helps speed up the security check, but also protects their valuables—especially CE devices.

Faster Scans

On Nov. 19, 2001, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act was signed into law. This law created the Transportation Security Administration (www.tsa.gov), which is responsible for protecting America's transportation systems. By February 2002, the Administration had taken on the task of securing all of the airports in the United States

according to congressional mandates for screening passengers and baggage.

All checked and carry-on bags are subject to inspection by high-intensity X-ray scanners such as the CTX 5500 machine made by InVision Technologies (www.gesecurity.com). Items placed inside these machines, which are about the size of a small truck or van, are first subject to an X-ray and then a scan. In both instances images of the item are projected on a monitor for personnel security to view.

Though occasional mistakes occur, scanners can speed up the boarding

process because TSA workers don't have to examine all the carry-on items manually, unless an item sets off the scanner's alarm or security personnel notice anything suspicious on the machine's monitor. While it's up to TSA officials to monitor all the items that go on a plane, it's up to passengers to properly pack.

Think Slim

The TSA has posted many guidelines for how to pack and proceed through the screening process on its Web site. One rule is that you should not pack electronic devices in your checked baggage. It's not that scanners will harm them; "There is no security or technological reason why travelers cannot pack small electronic devices in their checked baggage," says TSA spokesperson Carrie Harmon. Digital cameras, memory cards, cell phones, notebooks, MP3 players, camcorders, CDs, and DVDs, for instance, can safely pass through the machines. In fact, the only thing related to CE that could be harmed by airport scanners is unprocessed film.

This rule, Harmon says, is more for the traveler's peace of mind: It's comforting to know you have your valuables with you, instead of in a bag that is at a higher risk of getting misplaced or even possibly damaged.

However, it can make packing a bit tricky if you have a number of CE devices to take with you. The TSA states that you are allowed to board a plane with one small piece of luggage and one personal item, such as a purse or notebook. In addition, you are permitted to carry one bag of photographic equipment. Keep in mind, however, that each airline may have its own rules governing the number and size of carry-on items.

Unless you want to juggle several bags during the screening process, your best bet is to use a notebook bag that also can hold smaller items, such as a camera,

phone, and PDA. (See "Bags That Make It Easier.") In fact, the TSA Web site says you should place your phone and PDA in your carry-on bag before you arrive at the screening checkpoint.

Though size is certainly not the only consideration when purchasing electronics, frequent travelers need to think slim and compact when shopping. The new customizable IBM ThinkPad X60 (\$1,399 and up; www.lenovo.com), for instance, starts with a 1.66GHz processor and a 40GB hard drive, runs Windows XP Pro, and is only 10.5 inches wide.

We also love taking cameras on vacation or when we travel, but it can take up quite a bit of space in your bag. However, the new Canon PowerShot SD600 digital camera (\$349.99; www.usa.canon.com) packs 6MP of resolution and a 2.5-inch display in a frame that's less than an inch thick, so it makes a light travel partner.

Out Of The Bag

Another TSA rule dictates special treatment of notebook computers and camcorders. Like your carry-on bag or other personal item, you must submit notebooks and camcorders to preboarding screening. You'll need to remove the item from its case and place both in a bin that will carry them through the scanner.

This rule makes the screening process easier for the security officials. Camcorders and laptops by themselves don't pose a special threat, according to Harmon. "Sometimes the accessories can get jumbled up in the bag and look like something threatening to the screeners," she says. By looking at the case and notebook separately, she says, security officials can more easily assess that nothing dangerous or improper is hidden inside.

Although your notebook is safe from the X-rays and CT (computed tomography) technology of security equipment, you

need to take extra precaution with protecting these higher-priced devices. Always label your notebook with your business card or other identifying tag so that you can easily spot it after it has been scanned. Remember, other passengers may be carrying similar products, so you don't want to risk mixing up or losing your property. (See "Hang On To Your Valuables.")

If you travel often with your notebook, it's a good idea to invest in a laptop bag that gives you easy access to your electronics. Look for one with a removable protective sleeve—these not only let you

Hang On To Your Valuables

The best way not to lose CE devices in the airport is to follow the TSA guideline to store all your electronics and other valuables in a carry-on bag or case before the preboarding security check. Then, as much as possible, keep your eyes on the scanner, so you can spot your bag, notebook, and other items immediately when they exit the machine.

Securely attach your business card or other identifying tag directly on your notebook case and on your other bags, too. Also, consider putting something highly noticeable—even garish, such as brightly colored tape—on the notebook case and camcorder to make those items stand out.

Don't forget to affix small labels with your name, address, and home or office phone number on your cell phone, PDA, and other items. Also, write down the serial numbers of your products, keeping one copy with you and another copy at home. Should you lose a device, you can identify it if the personal ID label is missing once it's found. ●


quickly take the laptop out, but also let you easily slide it back in. No more holding up the line while you stuff everything back into your carry-on. The Icon brand of notebook totes and bags from Motion Systems (www.beteshgroup.com/icon) includes a chocolate- and caramel-colored Selma bag (\$199.99) with such a sleeve. This leather/nylon bag stores notebooks up to 15 inches wide, and it's gorgeous to boot. For more of our favorite laptop bags for traveling, see the "Bags That Make It Easier" sidebar.

Foggy Film

Travelers who still use film-based cameras have special needs to consider when packing and walking through the pre-board routine. You should not put any unprocessed film in a checked bag because scanners will damage the film. You won't notice the damage until after you've processed the film. Then you'll see the "foggy" effect on the images, like these examples posted on the Kodak Web site (www.kodak.com/global/en/service/tib/tib5201.shtml).

One good habit is to pack film in a clear plastic bag and then request a security official to manually inspect the film. (FAA regulations allow such requests, but airport/security officials in other nations may not.) Then you can slip the film bag back into your camera bag or other carry-on piece. To make your return trip easier, develop used film before flying home.

Safe Travels

While no traveler enjoys security checks, we all can fly with a little more peace of mind knowing that extra security precautions have been taken. While TSA, airport, and airline personnel are watching out for your safety, you can take precautions to protect your electronics and other valuables. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

Bags That Make It Easier

A roomy notebook bag can help ease you through security checks at airports. Not only can you quickly reach in to get your notebook to run it through the scanner, but you also can keep accessories and other small CE devices (cell phone, camera, MP3 player) tucked safely inside, keeping your hands free of clutter.

Mobile Edge makes laptop bags and cases, including a line just for women, in a wide variety of styles, finishes, and colors. The London (\$119.99), for example, comes in either a patent leather or microfiber finish. The SafetyCell compartment can hold notebooks up to 15.4 inches wide. The London also features separate sections for paperwork and wireless devices and has a removable accessory/cosmetic pouch. In fact, it's so roomy and stylish you can use it for an overnight bag if you remove the SafetyCell.

If you really do travel light, though, look for a bag that holds just your laptop. We love Acme Made's New Tote (\$249.99 to \$324.99), which lets you comfortably and stylishly carry just your computer. Yes, it's got two interior pockets for a couple of small items, too, but overall, it's for the traveler who wants to carry only the necessities. (And considering how hard it is sometimes to find overhead storage space on flights, we wish more people would use these types of bags!) ●



London Tote • \$119.99 • www.mobileedge.com

tips

Keep Your CE Dry

1

Use The Tools You Have

It's wise to use the carrying cases that come with your gadgets. Those protective pouches made specifically for each device are your best friend against the elements. Faux leather and drab vinyl may not be the most attractive coverings ever devised, but they're already paid for and are pretty much guaranteed to fit. And rather than scrambling to find cover every time it starts raining, make it a habit to store your gear in cases all the time; you'll get some protection from drops and dust in the process.

2

Get Creative

If you didn't keep the carrying case or if your device didn't come with one, head for the kitchen. Shelter your cameras, music players, or GPS (global positioning system) units in resealable plastic bags or waterproof containers. Grab extras (the little snack-sized bag are perfect) for storing extra memory cards, batteries, and other accessories. Not only will you protect your gear from the weather, but you'll also find it easy to keep everything organized, and you'll be less likely to lose those little parts.

3

Shop Smart

If you live in Seattle or spend a lot of time outside during the rainy season, it only makes sense to account for the weather in your buying decisions. Look for products that work well with your lifestyle and location, with a premium on waterproof or water-resistant technologies. One example, the Pentax Optio WP10 (Price TBA; www.pentaximaging.com) is a digital camera that's waterproof to roughly 3 feet deep, which should just about cover you even in Hilo during the rainy season. And with 6MP, a 3X optical zoom, and several color choices, the Optio WP10 doesn't skimp on substance or style, either.

4

Control The Damage

What do you do when your preventative measures fail, and your stuff gets soaked? Whether it's just a little rain on your music player or a phone in the dog dish, power off immediately and remove the battery, if possible. Take apart removable pieces and set them out to dry. Give it a couple days if you can; sometimes water will lurk a while in places you wouldn't expect. If water leaves residue or corrosion behind, swab affected areas with a touch of rubbing alcohol. If that still doesn't work, you have an official excuse to go shopping.

5

Buy Extra Protection

Several products and vendors, including OtterBox for iPod (\$19.95 to \$49.95; www.otterbox.com) and KeepItDryCase.com (\$23 to \$275; www.keepitdrycase.com), offer waterproof cases designed specifically for popular devices, including iPods, digital cameras, camcorders, and mobile phones. Although sandwich bags offer short-term protection in a pinch, you may prefer something designed specifically to protect expensive electronic equipment. With many of these cases, you can still control your gadgets (and even shoot pictures) right through the plastic. Most products are waterproof to several feet deep, so you don't have to avoid the rain or the kiddie pool.



BY GREGORY ANDERSON

music & movies

music

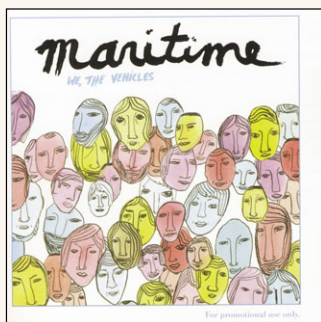
BY SAM EVANS

Maritime

• Available: Now • Price: \$12.98

WE, THE VEHICLES

[Hemeshovel Records]



Though Maritime is a relatively new band (the group released its first album, "Glass Floor," in early '04), it is quickly carving its niche in the music world by combining aspects of pop, rock, and ska music. "We, The Vehicles" is an easy-to-listen-to album that you can absent-mindedly groove to. If, however, that doesn't suit you, there is enough musical experimentation and style differentiation on the album to keep your attention. The band creates a freeing, yet forceful environment in "Calm," the introductory track. This is a driving number that expresses a message of optimism and strength despite shortcomings we all have. The next track, "Tearing Up The Oxygen," is a sweet pop tune, and it alone makes the album worth checking out. The strumming patterns and chord-outlining techniques in songs such as "People, The Vehicles" and "Parade Of Punk Rock T-Shirts" give the album a cool retro feel.

Milosh

• Available: Now • Price: \$13.99

MEME

[Plug Research]



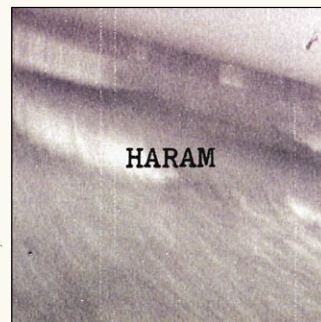
Milosh's first album "You Make Me Feel" showed us the inspirational power of love; "Meme," his follow-up, shows pain can be just as inspirational. "Meme," the by-product of a dissolving relationship, is a wonderful addition to any electronica library, as it explores the gamut of emotions that go along with being suddenly single.

Haram

• Available: Now • Price: \$11

S/T

[Lovitt Records]



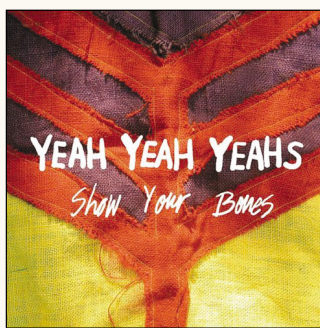
Haram offers an intense punk sound for those of us looking for music with a little bite. The harmonies are undeniable and easy to pick up, and the vocals show a certain flair and flamboyance similar to Mick Jagger. Haram's "S/T" is a spacey and interesting chapter in the progressive-punk movement.

Yeah Yeah Yeahs

• Available: Now • Price: \$13.98

SHOW YOUR BONES

[Interscope Records]



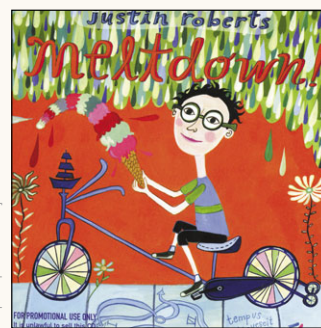
Following up the success of 2003's "Fever To Tell," the Yeah Yeah Yeahs have released "Show Your Bones." According to lead singer Karen O, "'Show Your Bones' is what happens when you put your finger in a light socket." That high-energy spirit makes this album another solid offering.

For The Kids: Justin Roberts

• Available: Now • Price: \$15.98

MELTDOWN!

[Carpet Square Records]



An alternative to sing along CDs from TV stars such as *The Wiggles* or *Teletubbies*, "Meltdown!" the latest offering from children's music up-and-comer Justin Roberts, puts an optimistic spin on situations that affect many kids' lives (dealing with the monster under the bed, getting glasses). We enjoy Roberts' folk-rock style.

movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

\$28.98 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW



As J.K. Rowling's spellbinding series about an unassuming, yet brashly adventurous, teenage magician that fate has set on a collision course with the most evil wizard in existence nears its literary conclusion, the cinematic adaptations are just beginning to heat up. The original trio of Daniel Radcliffe (Harry Potter), Emma Watson (Hermione Granger), and Rupert Grint (Ron Weasley), thankfully reprise their roles in the most ambitious Potter movie to date. For viewers who haven't read Rowling's tomes, "Goblet" ostensibly follows Potter and his schoolmates' journey through Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Fresh into his fourth year, the Goblet of Fire inexplicably chooses Harry to compete alongside three other students (one each from three esteemed wizarding schools) in the Triwizard Tournament. Director Mike Newell did his best to cram 734 pages of adventure into a two-and-a-half-hour movie, but discriminating Pottermaniacs will surely notice the omissions.

King Kong (2-Disc Special Edition)

\$30.98 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: MARCH 28



Leave it to Peter Jackson, the man who artfully tackled J.R.R. Tolkien's sweeping "Lord of the Rings," to breathe new life into this cinematic classic. Jackson's vision of the film is impressive, and the cinematography (especially Skull Island, where the bulk of the film takes place) is as much of a star as Kong himself. Andy Serkis, who brought Gollum to life in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, takes on a similar role by providing Kong's movements. Jack Black ("Shallow Hal," "School of Rock") shines as Carl Denham, an opportunistic filmmaker who whisks Ann Darrow, a down-on-her luck actress played by Naomi Watts ("The Ring," "21 Grams"), and screenwriter Jack Driscoll (Adrien Brody of "The Pianist") away to an uncharted island, only to stumble upon a primate of gigantic proportions. The rest takes place as one of Hollywood's most cherished stories.

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

\$29.99 • RATING: PG • AVAILABLE: APRIL 4



Everyone expected "King Kong" to be the box office darling of the holiday season, but "Narnia" proved to be the film that roared the loudest. The first work from C.S. Lewis' seven-book fantasy epic, "Narnia" follows four young siblings Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy Pevensie (played by relative newcomers William Moseley, Anna Popplewell,

Skandar Keynes, and Georgie Henley, respectively) who stumble upon a large wardrobe that spirits them away to Narnia, a mystical realm pitched in perpetual winter under the White Witch (Tilda Swinton of "Constantine"). Eventually, the four youngsters reach Aslan the Lion (voiced by Liam Neeson of "Michael Collins"

and "Kinsey"), the film's protagonist who opposes the White Witch. Some of the movie's Christian allusions are obvious, while others are more subtle. "Narnia" is a movie the entire family should enjoy and is a wonderful way to introduce younger generations to Lewis' novels.

Memoirs of a Geisha

\$28.96 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE MARCH 28



Even though the Academy snubbed "Memoirs of a Geisha" for its biggest awards (Best Actress, Directing, and Picture), wins for

Best Art Direction, Cinematography, and Costume Design vindicate it as a beautiful, visually and aurally immersive film. Ziyi Zhang ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," "Rush Hour 2") stars as Sayuri, a girl who emerges from humble beginnings in a Japanese fishing village to become one of Japan's most illustrious geishas. "Memoirs" stirred up a little controversy because Chinese actresses (Zhang, Michelle Yeoh, and Gong Li) play Japanese roles, but it doesn't change the fact that Zhang, Yeoh, and Li are quite convincing in their respective roles. The rags-to-riches story has been told before, but director Rob Marshall ("Chicago" and the TV-version of "Annie") makes it a work of art set against an Eastern backdrop.

games

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

• PRICE: \$59.99



RATING



Xbox 360

This highly anticipated, engrossing RPG (role-playing game) takes you on a sweeping adventure to search for the lost heir to the throne of Tamriel. Lush graphics create a positively breathtaking world for you to explore, but you can also partake in shorter challenges without tackling Elder Scrolls IV's larger, overarching quest. Gamers have the freedom to create heroes ranging from battle-hardened warriors to wise sorcerers.

• 2K GAMES • WWW.ELDERSCROLLS.COM

Ice Age 2: The Meltdown

• PRICE: \$39.99 (PlayStation 2, Game Cube, Xbox),
\$29.99 (Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS)



RATING



Multiplatform

Set to roughly coincide with the theatrical release of the animated feature film of the same name, Ice Age 2: The Meltdown follows the adventures of Manny, Sid, Diego, and Scrat as they try to flee the most vicious flash flood in prehistory. It's chock-full of entertaining mini-games, such as Sid's Slippery Sloth Slide Challenge. Tweens will love playing as the movie's main characters.

• VIVENDI UNIVERSAL GAMES
• WWW.ICEAGE2GAME.COM/US

Dance Factory

• PRICE: \$39.99



RATING



PlayStation 2

Not that you'd want to, but Codemasters' Dance Factory might train you to be the next Kevin Federline. (You're on your own for developing horrible rapping; no one can teach someone to be that bad.) Where the Dance Dance Revolution series featured preset dance steps to a limited number of songs, Dance Factory will create unique dance routines from any track of any CD, giving you the freedom to dance to whatever gives you happy feet.

• CODEMASTERS • WWW.CODEMASTERS.COM

NewerTech Clean & Polish Kit

• WWW.NEWERTECH.COM • PRICE: \$17.99

On the last gift-giving occasion, you gave the fumble-thumbs in your life a protective case for his iPod, Treo, BlackBerry, or other device. Unfortunately, that slip-on case came a little too late to save said gizmo from some nasty scratches. Time to rectify those blemishes with this kit from NewerTech (\$17.99; www.newertech.com). It comes with a polishing cloth and step-by-step directions on how to buff out most scratches from many plastics. The final polish leaves behind a surface that NewerTech says resists fingerprints, dust, static, and fogging.



Mobile Edge Milano

• WWW.MOBILEEDGE.COM • PRICE: \$99.99 TO \$129.99



We'll bet Paris Hilton wishes she'd had one of these. Someone wirelessly hacked her cell phone a while back, but the hacker wouldn't have been able to do so had Paris kept it in a Milano notebook bag from Mobile Edge (\$99.99 to \$129.99; www.mobileedge.com). Inside is a zinc-lined pouch called a Wireless Security Shield. It stops all wireless transmissions—"push" ads, Bluetooth, BlackBerry messages, and even incoming calls—from reaching your phone, Treo, or other gadget. When you're safely away from coffeehouses and other wireless danger zones, take your phone out and check your voicemail or email. The Milano comes in pink, blue, or black, for 15.4- or 17-inch notebooks.

Digital Foci Media Buddy

• WWW.DIGITALFOCI.COM
• PRICE: \$229.99 TO \$309.95

Digital photo buffs love the idea of a pocket-sized hard drive that allows them to move their memory cards' photo files to it and then keep on clicking with the newly emptied cards. Digital Foci's new Media Buddy lets shutterbugs do this at a lower price than they might expect. Prices range from \$229.95 for a 30GB Media Buddy up to \$309.95 for an 80GB model (www.digitalfoci.com).

However, you can't actually view photos on the Media Buddy's text screen as you can on Digital Foci's pricier Picture Porter (\$399 and up). Both devices support most memory cards, plus USB 2.0, so you can transfer photos to a computer later on. Available in Powder Blue, Arctic Silver, and Pearl Gray, the Media Buddy even doubles as an MP3 player.



... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

what they're SAYIN

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

Knowing what features you want in a digital camera makes shopping for a new one a great deal easier. Most of the women we interviewed this month placed different demands on their cameras, but portability was an issue for several of them.

Erin Fahey

STUDENT

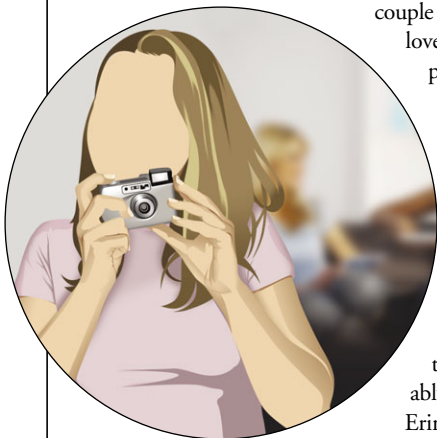
Erin is from the south side of Chicago, and she's a junior at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, majoring in Recreation, Sport, and Tourism. She's not sure what she's going to do with it, but she says, "The experience of being at the U of I is what's important. I have my whole life to decide what to do with it, although I think I'd be a good event planner; I'm pretty organized."

Growing up as the daughter of a professional photographer, Erin has definite ideas about what she wants in a camera. She has a

Canon ELPH Z3 that she's had for a couple of years and that she loves. She's not ready to replace it just yet, but when she is, Erin says, "It has to be just as good as my ELPH or forget it. My standards are high, and just because a camera is cute or the latest 'in' thing doesn't mean I'll like it. The only thing I'll upgrade to is a D-SLR and probably only a Canon."

Erin says, "People get caught up in the megapixel craze, but what's important to me is interchangeable lenses.

As any decent photographer knows, you need to be able to swap out lenses as the situation demands. That's my No. 1 criteria: Can I swap lenses? And I want a camera with a pentaprism, too."



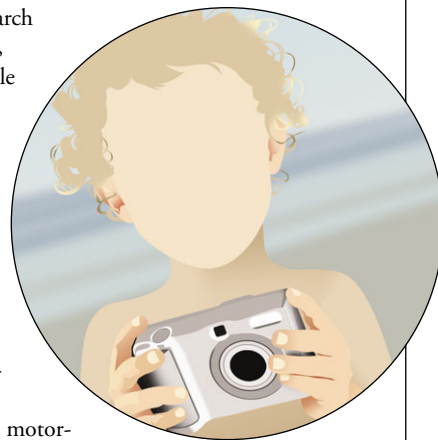
Michele Suggitt

EMPTY NESTER

Michele is a widow, a mother of two grown sons, and an empty nester. We asked her what she looked for in a digital camera, and Michele says, "I had been talking about getting a digital camera but was a little unsure of which one. I needed one that's easy to use, compact, and has an LCD that's a decent size for bifocal eyes." Because she wasn't sure, she did a little research and asked her son, Cam, and his wife, Jen. Michele says when they showed her all the great features digital cameras have, she was excited.

After looking at a few models, Michele says, "I went with a Kodak C340 Easy-Share, as it seemed easy to use and fit all my criteria. I have an active lifestyle, which includes motorcycle trips, and I wanted a compact camera that fit in any bag or pocket."

In addition to taking travel pictures, Michele especially likes to take pictures of her grandson, Alexander. One of her biggest reasons for buying a digital camera was the convenience and speed with which she can access the pictures. In the past, she says, processing pictures from her old camera meant a 30-mile trip for one-hour photos or a trip to the store where they'd send in the film and return the pictures in two days. She says, "Being able to download the pictures to a PC and print them instantly is great. It was a little intimidating to switch to a digital camera, but I like taking pictures and then being able to delete a picture if it is not exactly right. I used my camera on a recent trip to Las Vegas, and I am happy to say that it captured memorable moments well."





What features do you look for in a digital camera and why?

Kim McEnaney

MOM

Kim's home with her two children, daughter Jamie (4 years old) and a son Jake (5 months old). She had an Olympus Digital 5050, which was a good camera, but she told her husband Mike she wanted a camera that was a little more portable. With a diaper bag, a bottle bag, and two little ones, a hefty, heavy digital camera was too much to carry. Her husband recently gave her a Kodak V570, and the camera is the perfect size to slip into the diaper bag and take with her whenever she goes out. She always has the camera with her, whether she and the kids are at the park or the beach. It's always in the bag, and Kim says she uses the V570 to shoot short movie clips, so she doesn't have to tote along a video camera, too.

On average Kim says she takes between 10 and 20 pictures of her kids each week unless they go somewhere special and then she takes more. She eventually sorts through the pictures and archives them on her computer. She also saves the video clips, and she emails them to family members.

Of the many features she likes, Kim says, "I especially appreciate it that the camera gives you a heads up on the quality of an image because I can't always tell on the LCD. Sometimes an image looks clear, but it's blurry when I print it. In this camera, if it's clear, a hand on the image viewer is green. If the hand is yellow, it means the picture may be blurry when you go to print it, and if it's red, that definitely means the picture is blurry, so don't bother." She also likes the ability to delete the images she's not planning to print from the camera without having to download them all to her computer first.

Donna Kromm

MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT

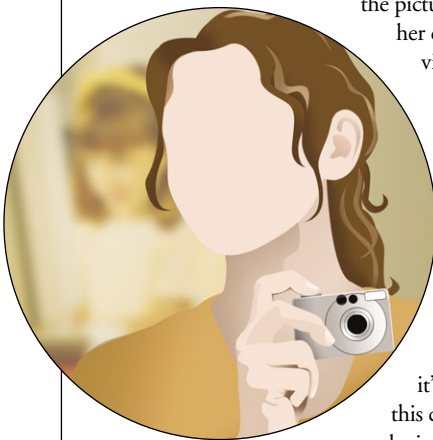
Donna and her husband Alan use their digital camera, an Olympus, personally and professionally. Alan's an architect, and they take pictures of his projects (before, during, and after). Donna and Alan are researching wide-angle lenses for the Olympus, and they then hope to use the Olympus only for business. Donna is planning to get a smaller, more portable camera for personal use, so she can drop it in her purse and take it with her.

She hasn't done a lot of research, but Donna says she usually goes online, looks at Top 10 lists, and reads reviews of cameras with the latest and greatest features. Her husband's more serious because he's ready for her to give up the Olympus to him.

One reason she hasn't rushed into the research is because she really likes her camera; she says it takes great pictures. Donna also loves her printer. It's a Canon S820, and it has six ink cartridges—each for a different color. It's so much more economical than the older inkjets that combined all colors into one cartridge. Now, when a cartridge runs out, instead of replacing one cartridge containing every color, whether they're all empty or not, she simply replaces the color that's empty.

Donna plans to use the new digital camera primarily to take family pictures, especially of her daughter. Capturing images of an active 3-year-old girl isn't always easy, and Donna says, "The only complaint I have about the Olympus is the shutter lag time; I've lost great shots with this camera because of that delay. So, that's what I'm focusing my research on for the new camera. I want one that captures pictures when I push the shutter." She also wants a camera with a feature to eliminate red eye (or have an on-camera editor to correct for it). Of the two, capturing the picture is her first concern, and eliminating red eye is second.

A final feature important to Donna is a camera that takes AA batteries instead of rechargeables. Donna says, "My Sony Handycam uses rechargeable batteries. When they're out, I can't use the camera until the batteries recharge. I've carried around an extra rechargeable battery, but they just don't hold their charge very long. With AA batteries, when they're drained, I can replace them without waiting for them to recharge. I can slip a couple extra batteries in my purse, and if I don't have them, I can buy AA batteries at nearly any nearby store. You need a camera or other specialty store for rechargeable batteries, and they're expensive."



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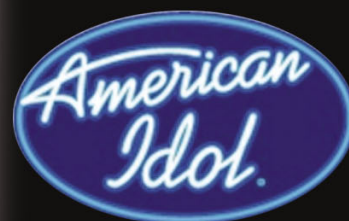
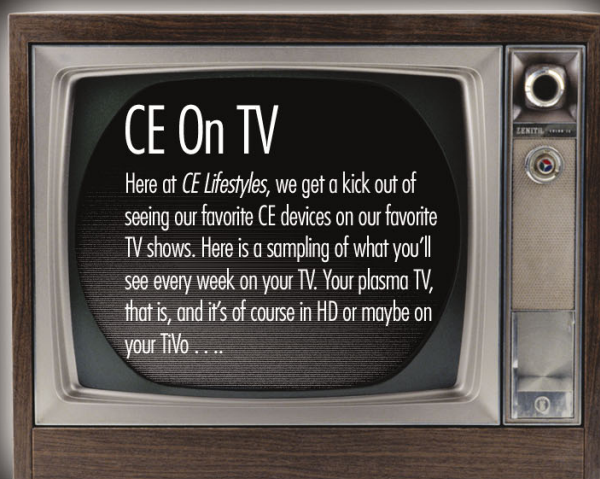
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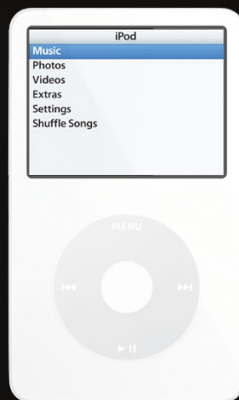
the office

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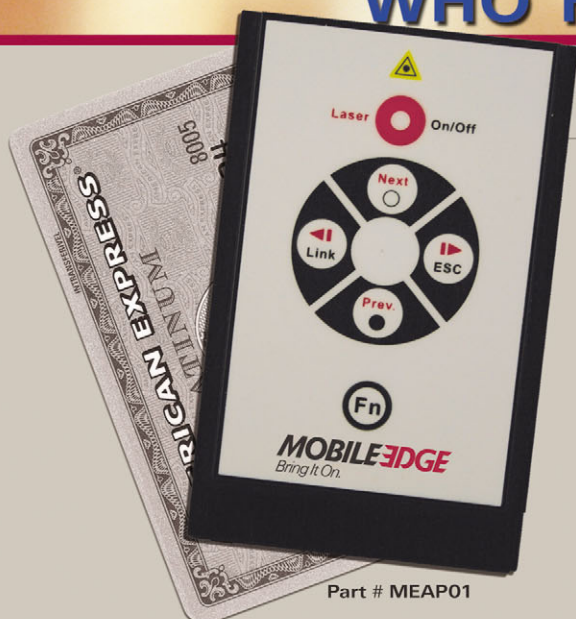
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¹ Electronic House magazine award for the 42" Olevia (LT42HV). ² IT Week magazine award for the 27" Olevia (LT27HV). ³ About.com award for the 32" Olevia (LT32HV). ⁴ 2005 Electronic House Expo Multi-Room Audio/Video award for the 42" Olevia (LT42HV).

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